













# SUPERINTENDENT WILSON'S HOLIDAY

*by*

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hypothesis should break down under me and the Department get into a very awkward row. It was a stroke of luck that it turned out all right. Of course, if it hadn't been for Michael I couldn't have brought it off at all."

"You are rather good at deriving assistance from the brute creation, then," Michael Prendergast laughed. "I should say I was about as much help as a hibernating tortoise. I didn't do anything, and what you were up to I hadn't the slightest idea."

"I was alluding to your substantial and inescapable presence, my dear Michael," Wilson retorted, "and to your excellent medical degree. But as a matter of fact you were standing at my elbow practically the whole time and could have followed all the steps in my conclusions."

"So could a tortoise, no doubt," said Prendergast, "if it was standing at the elbow of a man who was just preparing to convert it into tortoiseshell. For all I knew, you were going to order *my* arrest any moment."

"You forgot, then," Wilson said, "that *I* was the principal witness to your alibi, and that up to the present I have generally—though probably without warrant—considered myself a reliable witness. Also, if you will forgive my saying so, the crime was entirely beyond your powers. Your ingenuity doesn't lie in that direction."

At this point several of the company demanded that the two friends should cease talking in riddles and should explain what the case was which presented such remarkable features; and by dint of

much cross-questioning—neither of the two having any pretensions to narrative powers—they succeeded in getting out of them the following story.

The Downshire Hill Murder (to give it its newspaper name) was discovered about half-past nine on a Sunday morning of May, 1920, one of those lovely mornings with which our climate tries to pretend that it really knows how to make a summer. Superintendent Henry Wilson of New Scotland Yard was walking along Downshire Hill, Hampstead, in company with his friend Dr. Michael Prendergast. It was long before the sensational death of Radlett, the millionaire,<sup>1</sup> which, as everyone will remember, covered England and America with placards, and drove Wilson, who had committed the unpardonable sin of detecting an ex-Home Secretary in shady courses, into the exile of private practice. He was still a C.I.D. man, liable at any moment to be called from bed and board to attend to public affairs, and it was not without some misgivings that he had obeyed the commands of his sister, with whom he was staying, to put himself for one day at least beyond reach of the telephone. However, it was a wonderful morning; and Michael Prendergast, one of his few intimate friends, who had spent the Saturday evening and night with him, had added his entreaties; and the result was that the two men, in flannels and tennis shirts, were now walking briskly down the road to the North London Station, where they intended to catch a train for Richmond.

<sup>1</sup> See *The Death of a Millionaire*, by G. D. H. and Margaret Cole

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"You'd almost think you were in the country here," Prendergast said appreciatively, noting the trees which filled the little front gardens and the young green of the Heath which closed the end of the road. "There was an owl hooting outside my window all night."

"They do come close to the houses here," Wilson replied, "but I never heard of one actually nesting in the wall of a house before."

"Nor I. Why?" For answer Wilson pointed to the ivy-clad wall of a little house about a hundred yards farther down, which was only just visible through a mass of lilac and young chestnut. "Something flew in and out of the ivy just there, between those boughs," he said.

Prendergast stared at him. "You have sharp eyes. I was looking at the lilac, and I didn't see anything. How do you know it was an owl, anyway, at this distance?"

"I don't," Wilson said. "It may not have been. I couldn't see it at all clearly. But it was too big for any other bird. Anyway, somebody else appears to have seen it too." They were now approaching the ivy-clad house, which, though hidden from view on the west, was quite open in front, and standing by its gate on the pavement was a man to whom it appeared to be an object of enormous interest. As the two friends passed, he looked up at them with a dubious air, which suggested that he was wondering whether to open a conversation; and Prendergast, who never could resist conversing with all and sundry, responded promptly to the suggestion.

"Have you seen the owl, too?" he asked.

"Owl!" said the man. "I ain't seen no owl. But I've seen a man go in there," he pointed to the house. "What's he want to go in for, that's what I want to know."

"Perhaps it's his house," Prendergast suggested.

"Ho!" said the man. "Then what's he want to go in by the window for, that's what I want to know. Banging on the door fit to wake the dead, he was. When he sees me, he says, 'Something wrong here,' he says. 'Can't get no answer,' and he outs with a knife and gets in at the window. And what's he want to bang for, if it's his house, and what's wrong in there, that's what I want to know." He spat suspiciously.

In a moment his question was answered in a sufficiently dramatic manner. There was a sound of feet within the house; the front door, which was only a matter of twenty yards from the gate, opened suddenly, and a little man, pale and frightened in appearance, looked out and yelled in a voice of surprising power to come from a person of his physique, "Murder!"

All three started; and indeed the cry had sounded as if it must reach Camden Town at least. On seeing their astonished faces the man at the door looked rather confused, and coming down to the gate, said in a considerably lower tone, "Will you fetch the police, please, gentlemen? Mr. Carluke's been murdered."

He then closed the gate, and made as if to return to the house; but Prendergast, with a nod from

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Wilson, followed him up the path. "Can I do anything?" he said pleasantly. "I'm a doctor."

"'Tisn't a doctor he wants, poor fellow," said the little man. "He's as cold as a fish. He must have died hours ago." He stopped with his hand on the hall door. "If you'll fetch the police, sir, I'll stay with him. I don't think the house ought to be left alone. And there's nobody there."

"That's all right." Wilson, who had stopped to speak to the man at the gate, now came up to them. "I am from Scotland Yard. Here's my card." He produced one from his cigarette case, and Michael looked on with amusement, wondering what use he had intended to make of his official dignity at Richmond. The little man took it gingerly, as if it had been a spider, and looked with obvious distaste at the owner's clothes. Quite clearly he thought that policemen ought to dress as policemen and not stroll about in flannel trousers.

"I've sent that man to the Rosslyn Hill station with a message," Wilson went on. "They'll be here in a few minutes. But, as you say, the place oughtn't to be left alone. So, if you'll show me where the body is, I can start making the preliminary investigations, and my friend here can see how he was murdered. You're certain he was, Mr.——?"

"Barton," said the little man. "Edward Barton. He was murdered all right, sir. Shot right through the head. His brains are all over the floor, poor fellow. This way, sir." He seemed a trifle hurt at the doubt thrown on his diagnosis.

"Well, well, we'll see," Wilson said soothingly. "Where is he?"

"Telephone cabinet," said Mr. Barton, pointing. "By the stairs on the right. That glass door. It's his foot that's holding it open. I haven't touched him. I just made sure he was dead, poor fellow."

## II

It was not a pleasant sight which greeted them when Wilson pulled open the door of the little dark telephone cabinet; and it thoroughly justified Mr. Barton's confidence in his own verdict. On the floor, crumpled up, with one foot half across the sill of the door, lay what once must have been a hale man of between fifty and sixty years of age. His body had fallen in a heap, facing the telephone, and the fingers of both hands were curved as if he had died gripping something which he had subsequently dropped. But the cause of death was plain enough; for the whole front of his face and part of his head had been pierced in a number of places, and the blood and brains which had oozed out from the wounds had covered the floor. Michael Prendergast had been through the war, and thought himself used to death; but the sight of the old man lying shattered in that gloomy, musty shambles stirred emotions in him which he believed wholly conquered and he had to struggle with a violent feeling of nausea before he dared step across the threshold.



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"Go carefully, Michael," Wilson warned; and Prendergast noted with shame and annoyance that he seemed wholly unmoved by the sight. "Don't tread in more than you can help. We'll want all the clues we can get." He surveyed with displeasure some unmistakable footprints in the blood that covered the floor. "You've been in here, Mr. Barton?"

"Of course I have," said Mr. Barton in injured tones. "I went to see if I could do anything for him, naturally. When I found I couldn't, I looked round to see if there was a revolver or anything anywhere. In case he shot himself, you see—in case it was suicide."

"Turn on the light, will you?" came Prendergast's voice from where he was bending over the body. "I can't see anything in this coal-hole."

"It's broken," said Mr. Barton. "I tried it when I came in." He was, however, obediently reaching his hand to the switch, a porcelain one of the old pattern, when Wilson forestalled him. With a handkerchief wrapped round his hand he turned the switch backwards and forwards several times, but without result.

"It's broken all right," he said. "Probably the bulb's gone. You must make shift with my torch, Michael. But be as quick as you can. It's pretty obvious that we can't do anything for this poor fellow now, except to find his murderer, and I want to get on with that as soon as possible." While Prendergast finished his examination he stood still in the doorway, staring at the little room as if

memorizing its contents, at the telephone, which stood unperturbed on a rather high shelf at the far end, at a shelf above containing two or three old directories, and at a baize curtain which fell from the telephone shelf to the ground.

"What's behind that curtain, do you know?" he asked Barton.

"Boots—and some old rubbish, I think," the latter replied. "Mr. Carluke used to shove any stuff he didn't want there."

"You knew him quite well, then?"

"So-so," said Mr. Barton. "As well as anyone did, I daresay. He hadn't a great many friends; he was a bit of a queer old cuss, and didn't mind how much he was alone."

Prendergast straightened himself. "That's all I can do here," he said. "The poor chap's dead, of course—been dead about twelve hours, I should say, off-hand. He can't have lived more than a few seconds after he was shot."

"Shot from close quarters?" Wilson asked.

"Very close. Not more than a few inches, I should say. And—he was shot by a blunderbuss."

"Blunderbuss!" exclaimed the other two.

"Blunderbuss or something with an enormous charge of soft-nosed slugs in it. Beastly little things. Here are two I picked off the floor, and there are some more in his head. There must have been dozens in the charge."

"Extraordinary!" said Mr. Barton, with a kind of irritable incredulity. "Why should anyone want to shoot poor Carluke with a blunderbuss?"

"That's what we have to find out," said Wilson. "Perhaps, as you know the house, Mr. Barton, you'd take us into a room where we can talk."

The little man led the way into a small room which was obviously a sort of study or morning-room, and motioned Wilson and his companion to chairs. In broad daylight, Prendergast studied him with some interest, but found little to repay his scrutiny. He looked a very ordinary type of middle-class clerk or shopkeeper, about forty-five or fifty years old, with a bald crown fringed with grayish hair that had once been ginger, a ragged ginger moustache, and face and features of no particular shape. He appeared considerably upset and distressed by the position in which he found himself, rather more so than Prendergast would have expected, though, of course, it must be very trying for any friend of the murdered man. For all his agitation, though, he answered Wilson's questions clearly enough.

"Can you tell me Mr. Carluke's full name, and how you came to be a friend of his?" Wilson began.

"Harold Carluke," Mr. Burton replied. "Only we weren't exactly friends, as I told you, more kind of acquaintances. We came together through working in the same place, and we used to play chess a bit and go for a walk together now and then and so on."

"What place was that?"

"Capital and Counties Bank. Hampstead branch. Mr. Carluke is the cashier, and I'm head counter clerk."

"Had he any relations, do you know? Was he married?"

No, he wasn't married, Mr. Barton said. And he didn't think he'd any relatives. He'd once or twice spoken of a nephew, rather a wild young fellow, who seemed to give him some trouble. But that was all. Mr. Carluke wasn't the man to talk about his family, nor the kind you could put questions to. Not the sort many knew anything about.

"How comes it," Wilson asked, "that he is apparently alone in the house? Didn't he keep any servants?"

Barton explained that he did not. Mr. Carluke, it would appear, was something of a fussy old maid, and did not like to see servants about the house. So he employed only a daily woman who came in after he had left for business in the morning to clean and leave his supper laid for him, and departed before he returned. On Sundays she did not come at all. "You never saw anyone in such a bait as he was," Mr. Barton added, "if he found her in the house any time after he'd come home."

"What if he were ill?" Michael Prendergast's profession suggested to him. But it appeared that the question had not arisen. Mr. Carluke's health was excellent; he had never been known to miss a day at the bank.

"This charwoman, she must have had a key?" Wilson asked.

"I suppose she must have. But she doesn't come in on a Sunday. Besides the door was bolted and chained when I got in."

"The front door, you mean?"

"Yes; but the back door was locked and bolted too."

"Oh!" Wilson took this in. "You had a look round, then, before giving the alarm?"

"Only the ground floor," Barton licked his lips and looked at him with a kind of frightened appeal. "I couldn't see anything I could do for *him*. So I thought I might just see—if there was anyone else about."

"And was there?"

Barton shook his head. "No. Not a sign. But I wasn't long at it. Then I opened the door."

"I see," said Wilson. "How did you get in yourself?"

"Through that window"—pointing. Wilson crossed and looked at the window, whose catch had plainly been forced back.

"Why did you break in?"

"Couldn't get any answer. I'd called to go for a walk with Mr. Carluke as we'd arranged. Then I knocked and rang and couldn't make anyone hear. And I was a good bit behind my time, too, so I got a bit anxious—I thought he might be ill, perhaps. So I got in."

"I see. When did you last see him?"

"Last night."

"What time?"

"About—about nine o'clock," said Mr. Barton, licking his lips again and looking considerably distressed. Prendergast gave a start of surprise; then, remembering that he was in effect representing the law, pulled himself together and tried to look as impassive as Wilson. No wonder the little man was showing signs of alarm. His own position was certainly dubious.

"Could you tell us what happened?" Wilson inquired. Mr. Barton could, and did, not without a good many nervous glances at Wilson's face. He had gone round at Mr. Carluke's invitation for high tea and a game of chess. He had had to leave about nine o'clock because he had promised to fetch his wife home from an evening party at some neighbours' in Hendon; but the two men had arranged to go for a country walk on the Sunday. Barton had then left, arranging to call at nine o'clock in the morning to fetch his friend, and Carluke had seen him out of the house and walked with him as far as the corner of Willow Road, where they had parted. Then Barton had gone on to fetch his wife; but they had stayed very much longer at the party than they had intended and had not got back to their home in Hendon until nearly one. As soon as he knew they were going to be late, he had tried to telephone Mr. Carluke to suggest a less early start in the morning; but though he had tried twice, once from his friend's house and once from his own when he returned, he had got no answer. "I supposed he was out," Barton said. "Though it was a bit odd, though, because he said he was going straight to bed when he left me. He liked to keep early hours. So I tried again; but there was still no answer, so I supposed he was asleep. So I came round this morning as early as I could, as he'd be waiting."

"I see," said Wilson again. "You didn't meet anyone as you left, did you? When you were with Mr. Carluke, I mean."

"Not *meet*, exactly," said Mr. Barton, looking very nervous. "There were a lot of people about—it was a fine evening—but we didn't meet anyone. But we stood outside the Dog and Duck, at the bottom there, a minute or two. The landlord was in the doorway—I saw him—and he might have noticed us. He knows Mr. Carluke quite well. Look here," he burst out suddenly. "I know what you're getting at, and I know what it looks like! If he went straight back and locked up when he left me I was the last to see him alive. But *he was* alive and perfectly all right when I left him—I'll swear he was!" He half rose in his seat, and sat down again, looking fearfully at the others.

"Quite, quite," said Wilson soothingly. "I'm not trying to cast any suspicion on you, Mr. Barton. But we must find out what happened, you know. Now, if you two will excuse me, I'll start having a look at the place. The police ought to be here in a minute or two, and then I want you, Mr. Barton, to go along with them to the station, if you will, and tell the officer in charge what you've just told me." He rose to his feet. "By the way, Michael, did you find any signs of a struggle on the body?"

"None whatever," Prendergast promptly replied. "I should say he was shot before he knew what was happening."

"That was my impression, too," Wilson nodded, and disappeared into the hall. Prendergast would have dearly liked to accompany him and see how a Scotland Yard man handled the scene of a murder (his association with Wilson having hitherto been

entirely unprofessional) ; but he was distinctly in awe of his friend's official position, and felt sure that if he had been wanted he would have received an invitation. So he sat with what patience he could muster in the uncomfortable little study, while Mr. Barton, on the other side of the fireplace, huddled in his chair and uneasily bit his nails.

They had not long to wait, for in less than three minutes there was a sound as of heavy feet on the path, and a loud official knock rang through the house. Barton and Prendergast both sprang to their feet, but Wilson was before them ; and as they went into the hall they heard him giving a rapid account of the circumstances to an awestruck sergeant.

"Constable Wren's got your bag, sir," the sergeant explained. "I sent him round to Fitzjohn's Avenue for it as soon as I got your note. Lord, sir!" By this time they had reached the door of the telephone cabinet. "Well, he stopped one then, and no mistake, poor chap!" the sergeant said. "What was it, sir? Looks almost like a charge of grape-shot."

"Dr. Prendergast says it was a blunderbuss," said Wilson. "But you'd best get him along to the station at once. Is the ambulance here? Good. Get your man in and tell the divisional surgeon to examine him as quickly as possible. They can take Mr. Barton along with them too, and get his statement down. Is Inspector Catling there?"

"Just coming, sir," the sergeant said. "We rang him up, and he'll be along by the time the men get back."



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"Good. Then they might as well be getting on. You stay with me, and we'll go over the house. Put a constable to watch the door. I'm sorry, Michael"—he turned to Prendergast—"but I'm afraid poor Carluke has rather put a stop to our expedition. Will you go without me, or would you rather stay?"

"I'd rather stay, if I can be of any use," said Prendergast, as eager as a schoolboy; and Wilson smiled a little, and nodded. "I'd like you to go to the station with the constables if you will, Mr. Barton," he said to the morose little figure that hovered in the background, "and give your account to the inspector. But first there are one or two more things I want to know. Did Mr. Carluke ever have charge of money or valuables in his house, do you know? For the bank, I mean?"

"Not that I know of," Barton said. "But he wouldn't have told me if he had. He was as close as an oyster on bank business."

"Thank you. Now, this nephew that you spoke of. Do you know his name, or address, or anything about him?"

Barton thought. "Edgar Carluke, his name is. I think he's a ship's purser, and I *believe* he's ashore just now. But I don't know his address."

"He didn't stay here, then, when he was ashore."

"He did once," Barton said. "But they had a row about money, and he wasn't asked again. That's how I happen to know about the once, because I came to call in the middle of it."

"How do you mean—about money?"

"Oh, Edgar Carluke wanted some; and his uncle wouldn't let him have it. I don't know—I didn't hear any more than that. But perhaps Mr. Carluke would have something about him in his papers, if you want to know."

"Do you know where he kept his papers?"

"Upstairs, in a safe in his bedroom. It's the room above this."

"Thank you. What is the bank manager's name—the branch manager?"

"Mr. Warren. He lives in Belsize Park, but he's away."

"Thank you. By the way, we shall want a light in that telephone cabinet, and the bulb appears to be broken. Do you happen to know where Mr. Carluke kept his spares?"

"Yes, in a cupboard in the kitchen, left of the gas-stove."

"Would you mind finding me one, as you know where they are? Medium strength, please." Wilson went to the door of the kitchen, and stood waiting while Mr. Barton groped in a cupboard and extracted an electric bulb.

"This do?" he said, unwrapping it. "It's a forty."

"Thank you." Wilson took it from him. "Now, sergeant, call your men in and tell them to disturb things as little as possible in getting him out. Constable!" He called to the man standing on guard at the hall door. "Take Mr. Barton up to Inspector Catling at once and let him make his statement. Tell the inspector the sergeant and I

are going over the house and will let him know as soon as possible how things are going. And, constable," he drew the man aside a little, and the conversation dropped to a whisper. Meanwhile the ambulance men had come in and were taking out their melancholy burden. Prendergast, who shuddered afresh as the remains of Mr. Carluke came out of the telephone cabinet, could not but marvel at the cool calm with which the police officers did their business. When it was finished, Wilson dismissed the other constable, who strode firmly off, a dejected Mr. Barton following in his wake.

### III

"This is a shocking affair, sir," the sergeant began as the door closed on them.

"Shocking," Wilson agreed, beginning to open the case which the constable had brought, and which appeared to contain principally a number of little bottles of various kinds. "Did you know this Mr. Carluke, sergeant? Any idea why he should be murdered?"

"Not an earthly, sir," the sergeant said. "As quiet-spoken and nice an old gentleman as you could wish. Bit unsociable, they said, but nothing to matter. I shouldn't have said he'd an enemy in the world."

"So Mr. Barton seemed to think," said Wilson, extracting a thin pair of gloves and putting them on. "Well, we'd better get on. I've a feeling that we've no time to lose in this affair, if we want to

catch the murderer. Will you go round the house, sergeant, and look at the doors and windows and see if you can find how he got away? Michael, could you look in that cupboard and see if you can find me a sixty lamp? I think I won't use this one after all." He laid it on a shelf as he spoke; and the sergeant looked up suddenly as if he were going to speak, but apparently thought better of it. Prendergast found the required lamp without much difficulty, and was taking it into the telephone cabinet to replace the old one, when Wilson stopped him. "Let me do that," he said; and unscrewed the old lamp carefully from the top with his gloved hands. The sergeant gave a chuckle.

"Looking for finger-prints, sir?" he said. "The murderer's not very likely to have held on to the lamp, is he? Especially as it was broken."

"Oh, you never know," said Wilson. "Come in, Michael, and tell me what you think of it. You needn't mind treading there now. I looked at the footprints carefully before the men came in. Tell me how you think the man died." As he spoke, he was dusting the broken lamp and a card which he held in his hands with powder from his little bottles.

Prendergast stared round the little cabinet, which measured about seven feet by three. "He was shot here," he said. "He couldn't have moved after he had been hit, and he couldn't have bled like that if he'd been carried from anywhere else."

"That's so. And where was he shot from? Where did his murderer stand?"

"There, at the far end of the cabinet. You can

see by the direction of the slugs. There's one gone into the wall facing the telephone."

"And Carluke was standing—where?"

"Just by the telephone, I should think, from the way he fell. At the far end, anyway."

"Then where was the man who shot him standing? There doesn't appear to be any room for him. And do you suggest Carluke walked up to a blunderbuss and stood right in front of it?"

"It was dark. The light was broken."

"True, O Michael. But when it's on in the hall there is plenty light enough to see anyone inside the cabinet. I don't suppose Mr. Carluke kept his house in complete darkness. Try it yourself."

Prendergast went out into the hall to make the experiment, which resulted as Wilson had said. When he returned he found his friend blowing powder over the telephone. "He must have been behind the curtain," Prendergast said.

"Behind the curtain! My dear fellow, there isn't room! It's full of boots, and even if he'd removed the boots, the whole shelf is only a foot wide. A man couldn't get underneath it. You try. No, not this minute. Come and look at the telephone. This is rather interesting."

"Are those finger-prints?" asked Prendergast, looking at the instrument, to which little bits of yellow powder were adhering. "They don't look to me like anything."

"No, they aren't. The telephone's been rubbed clean. That's rather interesting in itself. People's charwomen aren't usually so particular. But that

wasn't what I meant. Look at the shelf just by it."

"There's a bloodstain on it," said Prendergast. "I suppose it's Carluke's. But why shouldn't there be?"

"Because," said Wilson, "that bloodstain was right *under* the telephone."

"What! Then he was actually telephoning when he was killed, and managed to put the telephone back! I shouldn't have thought he would have been able to."

"Neither should I," said Wilson. "What's more, I don't think he did."

"Then his murderer did. Jove, that was pretty cool. By the way, Harry, at that rate, couldn't you fix the time of his death, anyway? The telephone people keep records of calls, don't they? If you asked for the last call he had that would fix the time almost exactly."

"Perhaps," said Wilson. "If he was telephoning. But we don't know that he was, yet. And you haven't told me where the murderer stood."

"Well, damn it!" Prendergast cried after a pause, which Wilson utilised to powder the electric light switch. "If he wasn't behind the curtain, I don't know where he stood! Could he have been at the other end of the cabinet—no, that's impossible, the shots are all the wrong way. I suppose he must have sneaked in while Carluke was telephoning and come right up to him and shot him from just by his ear. But it seems an insane thing to do."

"It does," said Wilson. "Quite insane."

"Well, do *you* know where he stood? And why he used a blunderbuss? It seems an extraordinary sort of weapon. Why not a revolver? They're plentiful enough."

"I think I've an idea where he stood—or rather, where he *didn't* stand," Wilson replied, "though it's only an idea; and at present I haven't the ghost of a notion how to prove it. And I'm pretty sure I know why he used a blunderbuss. Think of the specific characteristics of blunderbusses, and you'll be able to answer that question for yourself. 'Hullo, what's this?' He was standing close by the telephone, peering at the shelf above it. 'God be praised, the charwoman isn't as thorough as might have been gathered from the telephone. Look there.'" Prendergast stared at the shelf, which was fairly thick with an accumulation of London dust. At one end, the end to which Wilson was pointing, there was a round depression in the dust about six inches across. "Something round has stood there," he said; and felt he was being a little obvious.

"It has," said Wilson. "And it has only recently been taken down, and it hadn't been standing there long. The dust on the mark is practically as thick as that on the rest of the shelf—it's only been compressed. Now look around, Michael, and tell me what made that mark."

"The telephone," Prendergast said promptly. Indeed it was the only possible object in sight.

"So it would appear. But we'd better make sure," said Wilson, proceeding carefully to measure the diameter of both telephone and mark. "Now

perhaps you can tell me why the late Mr. Carluke kept his telephone in so inconvenient a position? I can hardly reach it, and I should say I'm as tall as he was."

"Taller," said the man of science mechanically; and racked his brains to think why the telephone should have been removed to that distant shelf. To make room for the murderer, seemed the only possible answer; yet what could it possibly avail a murderer to have the telephone cleared out of the way? Prendergast's mind, as he told Wilson, could only conjure up the vision of a murderous gnome the size of a telephone, sitting on the shelf with a blunderbuss in his arms. He was rather surprised that Wilson smiled at him encouragingly.

"That's better," Wilson said. "You're beginning to use your brains."

"If the only result of using them is to produce hobgoblins," Prendergast grumbled, "I think they might as well be unused." At that moment he nearly jumped out of his skin, for the bell of the telephone shrilled suddenly through the silent house.

"Somebody ringing up Mr. Carluke?" he said, as Wilson lifted the receiver.

"No, it's the station," the latter said. "Yes, inspector. Yes. Wilson speaking. . . ." Prendergast wandered out into the hall, where the sergeant was just coming downstairs after a careful official search of the house.

"Well, whoever did that poor fellow in's got wings," he said. "There's nowhere for him to have



got out at. Back door's locked and bolted ; windows all fastened and the snibs as tight as anything with this weather. You couldn't possibly push any of them back from outside. There's one window open on the top floor, but no signs of anyone getting in or out. And the window's too small to climb through without leaving marks."

"What about the chimneys?" Prendergast suggested. "I suppose a murderer could climb up a chimney?"

"Not up a gas-flue he couldn't, doctor," said the sergeant. "It's gas all over the house, and the flues quite tightly fastened in. No, he flew, that's what he did. Unless he chopped himself up and put himself away in pieces. I've looked everywhere a man could possibly hide himself in this house, and there's no one there."

At this point the telephone bell tinkled to indicate the end of the conversation, and Wilson came out into the hall. "You've some very efficient men at your station, sergeant," he said ; and the sergeant blushed with pleasure. "They've checked Barton's statements already. His story's all right. The landlord of the Dog and Duck remembers him and Carluke passing the door last night, and actually watched Carluke back to his own house. Then they've got on to his hosts at Hendon, who say he arrived at nine-thirty and didn't leave till nearly one, and his wife and son say he came straight home."

"Sounds all right," said the sergeant. "Unless he came back after one."

"That would make it nearly two when he got

back," said Wilson. "Buses and tubes would have stopped running by then, and he hasn't got a car."

He looked at Prendergast with a question in his eyes.

"I don't think so," the latter answered. "I'm pretty sure he was dead long before midnight. Of course, one can't tell to an hour or so—but I'm pretty certain. Did you think Barton's alibi was wrong then?"

"No," said Wilson, "I didn't. But we had to check it."

"And in any case," said the sergeant, "if he did come back, how'd he get out again?" He explained to Wilson the difficulties. "What are we to do now, sir?"

"Search the house thoroughly," Wilson said. "And his papers. I've got his keys. I'll help you. Only we must be quick."

"Anything you're looking for particular, sir?"

"Oh, as for papers—anything bearing on the crime—or suggesting that anybody else has been at 'em. And for the rest—the weapon."

"Blunderbuss, sir?"

"That, or something like it. But it may have been taken to pieces. Look for anything that could conceivably be part of a blunderbuss. It ought to be somewhere in the house, I'm pretty certain, but I've no idea where."

"It's my belief, doctor," the sergeant said admiringly, as they began their search, "that Mr. Wilson's got the whole thing solved already."

"Only half solved, sergeant," said Wilson,

turning a rather anxious face on him. "I haven't got the motive, and I haven't got the weapon. And if we don't find one of them quickly I'm afraid I shan't get the murderer either."

#### IV

It was a long and depressing search that they conducted through the dead man's effects, while the minutes wore on, and Wilson's face got more and more tense. Prendergast felt that he had never till that morning known what a careful search really was. Wilson made them grope in every crevice, shake out every cushion and every piece of fabric; he felt along the seams of mattresses and chair seats; he made them turn out the dustbin and the sink and look under the traps; they even went into the little garden and searched the gravel path that encircled the house, and all its adjoining flower beds; but all in vain. There was no blunderbuss, nor any less unusual firearm to be seen; there was not even anything that might have been part of a blunderbuss. At length, after more than two hours' searching, they came to the safe, which Wilson unlocked with the dead man's keys.

"Doesn't look as if there was much to be found here, sir," said the sergeant, looking at the neat bundles of documents.

"Well, we can but try," said Wilson, beginning to examine the first packet.

"You know," he said after a few minutes, "I'm

## IN A TELEPHONE CABINET

inclined to think that somebody's been through these papers before us. They're just a little bit out of order—as if somebody had tried to put them back tidily who didn't really know what the order was. Like one's library after someone's been dusting it. But for the life of me I can't make out what the somebody was after. Whatever it was, if he took it away it's left no traces. What on earth could he have wanted? There's not much sign of the mysterious nephew, anyway. Mr. Carlisle seem to have been in the habit of destroying his private papers."

"You didn't," Prendergast, having no answer to the last question, suggested, "you didn't think anything of my idea that the telephone people might be able to give you the time of his death? That would settle people's alibis, anyway."

"I know," said Wilson. "The difficulty is, that I'm pretty certain he wasn't telephoning when he died."

But he was!" Prendergast cried. "You're forgetting his hands—his fingers, I mean. Don't you remember the way they were curved? I can just see them. They were exactly at the angle one uses to hold a telephone"—he illustrated with his own hands—"only a bit wider—as if it had been dragged out of them, and the rigor had fixed them in that position. I remember noticing at the time, and wondering what he could possibly have been holding. I thought it might have been the blunderbuss—but if it had been, of course, he'd be holding it still. But the telephone's much more

likely." He stopped with a feeling of triumph, for Wilson had dropped the papers and was looking at him with real respect.

"By George, Michael, I believe you've got it!" he said. "I'd quite forgotten his hands, fool that I am. Sergeant, do you happen to know if the Post Office have lost an instrument lately?"

"An instrument? I'm afraid I don't, sir," the sergeant chuckled, while Prendergast gaped at this unexpected result of his suggestion. "The Post Office attend to their own lost property."

"Then ring them up and find out, as quick as you can," was the reply. "Hurry up, man, the whole thing may depend on it."

"Why ever should you think they've lost a telephone?" Prendergast asked.

"It's only a guess," Wilson answered. "But if it's right, it makes the thing pretty certain."

The sergeant was away a long time, while Wilson and Prendergast patiently searched through a quiet old gentleman's most uninteresting private papers. When he came back, he gazed at Wilson with an expression almost of reverence on his face.

"How *did* you know, sir?" he said. "They *have* lost one. There was one pinched out of an empty flat in Golders Green within the last week or two; but they can't say exactly when, and they've no idea who took it. How did you know?"

"Well, it was a fairly obvious conclusion, wasn't it?" said Wilson. "I wish it was as obvious where it had got to. Come, we *must* find this thing. It a't have left the house; there wasn't time. And

there's nowhere he can have dropped it—Good Lord ! ” He sprang to his feet, and made for the door. “ The owl ! ”

“ What's the matter ? ” Prendergast said, following him breathlessly as he rushed down the stairs.

“ What a fool ! The owl, of course ! ” was all the answer he got. “ No, wait a moment. I'll be back directly.”

Prendergast and the sergeant stood at the hall door, gaping, while Wilson ran out into the road and about a hundred yards up the hill. There he stood for five seconds or so, staring up at the trees which all but screened the house from view ; and then he returned at the same pace. “ It's the bathroom window, I think,” he said as he regained the house ; and shot up the stairs, the other two following. Arrived at the bathroom he flung wide the window, which was the same that the sergeant had already found open, and leaned out as far as possible to the left, groping with his hand in the thick ivy that covered the wall. After two or three seconds' searching he gave an exclamation of triumph.

“ Got it ! ” he said. “ At least, I think so. Will you both please look carefully ? I want to have a witness to this.” He brought his hand back, with a fat envelope in it marked Capital and Counties Bank. This he handed to the sergeant. “ The weapon, sir ? ” the latter said, puzzled. “ There's more coming,” said Wilson ; and dived again into the ivy.

“ This wants careful handling,” he said as he

returned for the second time. In his hand was what at first sight looked like an ordinary telephone receiver. But on looking closely, it was apparent that the mouthpiece and the top of the telephone had been removed, and in their place was a fat muzzle of metal. Prendergast came close to it and stared down the black mouth of the thing.

"My God, it's the blunderbuss!" he said.

"It seems to be," said Wilson. "We'll have to take it to pieces to find out how it worked. But it seems quite clear what the murderer did. The inside of this instrument has been taken out to make room for the charge, and the hook for the earpiece is fastened to the trigger. A man going to answer a telephone ring in the dark—remember that broken light, sergeant, which was probably broken by the murderer—would take hold of the earpiece and let the gun off. You see now the point of having a blunderbuss—and a blunderbuss, as Dr. Prendergast noticed, charged with a peculiarly nasty type of expanding slug, like soft-nosed bullets. You can't make quite certain where a man's head will be when he's answering the telephone, and the blunderbuss was pretty safe to hit him wherever he was. There are some finger-prints on both the receiver and the earpiece"—he had been dusting it with powder as he spoke—"I'm pretty certain they are Carluke's, but we can compare them downstairs for certain. I took his prints on a card before he was taken away. Now, Michael, I think I can answer the question I asked you a while back—where did the murderer stand when he killed his victim? The answer is—

at a private telephone in Hendon. Sergeant, will you send down to the station and tell them to detain Edward Barton on suspicion of being concerned in the murder of Harold Carluke? I think you'll find he's still there."

"Good God, sir," the sergeant said. "What a diabolical thing! Do you mean he fixed up this affair and then went off and left the poor old boy to be shot next time he went to the telephone?"

"And then rang him up to make sure he did go," said Wilson. "Twice, you remember, in case he should have been out the first time. The telephone people will be able to trace those abortive calls for us. But, of course, he was dead long before the second one was made."

"Good God!" said the sergeant again. "The cold-blooded devil! Why did he murder him, sir?" He spoke as though he regarded Wilson as an eye-witness of the whole thing.

"I don't know that, yet," said Wilson. "But I shouldn't be surprised if the envelope you have in your hand throws some light on it." He tore it open, and a small bundle of cheques drawn on the Capital and Counties Bank fell out. Drawing a lens from his pocket, he made a rapid examination of the signatures.

"Of course, I don't know the Hampstead clients of the Capital and Counties Bank," he said. "But I should say there's no doubt that some of these are forgeries. Look at the waviness of that line in the glass. That's no true signature." He handed



cheque and glass to the sergeant, who nodded agreement. "I presume friend Barton had either written them or helped to pass them through; and that Carluke had found it out. If we get into touch with the bank manager, we'll probably get the whole story. But you'd better go and make sure of your prisoner. I doubt whether Catling's finding it easy to detain him."

## V

"You gave my eyesight better credit than it deserved. What I took for an owl was Barton's hand putting the papers away," said Wilson. "My only excuse is that I wasn't looking at the place at all. I only got a faint impression at the edge of the retina, and when I focussed on it, it was gone. There is only one spot in the road from which that particular bit of ivy is visible at all—and that spot's not visible from the window. Barton must have thought himself quite unobserved. But I nearly lost the clue, all the same, through not following up my impression quickly enough."

"What I don't see," Prendergast said, "is why you were looking for a weapon at all—why you thought it hadn't been taken away." They were discussing the case again after Barton's execution. Faced with the forged cheques and the incriminating telephone, his nerve had gone and he had confessed everything—incidentally giving away the actual forgers of the cheques which he had paid over the counter. The bank manager on his return had

supplied the information that investigations had been taking place into one of the forged cheques, which had been detected, and that the dead man had asked him for an interview as soon as he came back on that very subject. Hence the necessity for his murder. The rest of the crime was as Wilson had indicated—even to the stealing of the telephone from the empty flat in Golders Green and the careful breaking of the electric light bulb.

"Well," Wilson said. "I didn't see what else he could have done with it. He had only been in the house a few minutes, the man at the gate said—no time to take it anywhere else. Of course, he might have had it on him; but I didn't think he'd risk that, as he knew he would have to go to the police station. If I hadn't found it in the house, I was going to have him searched, as a last resort. But I didn't want to do that, because we should have had to let him go, after his complete alibi; and that would have given him plenty of time to find and destroy his weapon, or to leave the country."

"Then you knew all along he was guilty?" Prendergast asked. "How?"

"Well, I began to suspect him as soon as I'd had a look at the telephone cabinet. You see, it was so obvious, from the dimensions of the cabinet and the direction of the shots, that the murderer hadn't been in the cabinet at all. You saw that yourself, only you were convinced that he must have been. But there was no room for him to have been, and no signs of his departure. There were only Barton's footprints visible, and no one could have got out

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across the body and across that pool of blood without stepping in it. I tried myself. That suggested that the man was alone when he was killed, and that he was killed by some mechanical means or other ; and the fact that the bulb—a practically new one, as I daresay you noticed—was broken, was suspiciously convenient for a trap. I got Barton to put his finger-prints on another bulb for me so as to have a record of them, and later I discovered that the broken one bore prints of the same hand. Of course, that wasn't conclusive ; but it was suggestive. The bulb's well out of Barton's reach ; he wouldn't have been changing it in the ordinary course of events. That was his principal slip, by the way ; he wiped everything else clean—the real telephone rather suspiciously so—but he forgot the bulb.

“ Well, if the man was alone when he met his death, obviously his murderer could have a cast-iron alibi, so that any alibis could be left out of account in the preliminary investigations. Actually, it made Mr. Barton's own alibi a little suspicious—it almost suggested careful preparation. So when I'd got all I wanted out of him, I left you to look after him and went back to make a further study. Then I found, as I showed you, that there was blood *under* the telephone, showing that it had been put down after the crime. Carluke himself couldn't possibly have put it back, as you said ; he must have fallen as soon as he was hit ; and as additional evidence of that, I found, when I examined the telephone, that Carluke had apparently never touched it at all.

That meant that somebody else must have put it back after his death, and cleaned it after moving. But, so far as we knew, only Mr. Barton had been in the cabinet after his death. So I tried a little more investigation of Mr. Barton's movements; and when I found, first that the telephone had apparently stood very recently for a few hours on an exceedingly inaccessible shelf, and secondly, prints of somebody's bloodstained toe-tips just below the place where it had stood, and a smudge on the shelf below which looked uncommonly like the mark of a knee resting there, I was pretty certain that it was he who had moved it—and moved it back again when he 'discovered' the corpse.

"But why? As you very pertinently said, to make room for the murderer. At this point, I must admit, I was criminally slow. I ought to have thought of the dummy telephone at once. But I was still looking for an ordinary blunderbuss—probably fixed to the upper shelf, and fired by some mechanical arrangement—when your lucky recollection of the corpse's hands gave me the clue. Then it was plain sailing; we had only to find the dummy."

"Why didn't he wait a little longer, and take the thing to pieces, instead of giving the alarm at once?" Prendergast wondered.

"Probably because he didn't dare delay for fear of exciting the suspicion of the man at the gate," Wilson said. "Of course he didn't expect to find us there too. He thought he would be able to send the man to the police station, and have a quiet

twenty minutes to clear up. Our turning up was just a bit of bad luck for him. So was that tiny gap in the trees. Otherwise, except for the oversight in regard to the bulb, which might very easily never have been found, I think he showed remarkable intelligence. His acting of innocent apprehensiveness was very natural indeed, and his alibi, if I hadn't suspected him already, was just right, and not too circumstantial."

"Did you deduce the motive, too?" Prendergast inquired.

"Not really. I only noted that, as both men worked in a bank, there was one obvious possibility. But there might have been a hundred others. And you see, of course, the paramount necessity of haste. If we had stayed to look for the motive, we should never have got the man."

## WILSON'S HOLIDAY

It is always a difficult job to persuade Wilson to take a holiday ; for, as he is fond of saying, his work is his recreation, and he is apt to feel lost without it. On the occasion of which I am writing, however, I was adamant ; for he was really badly run down after a succession of gruelling cases, and I was afraid that, unless he gave himself a rest, even his physique would give way. In my double capacity, therefore, of friend and medical adviser, I brought strong pressure to bear. I not only ordered him positively to take an absolute rest, but proposed a joint walking tour, during which I made up my mind to ensure that neither cases nor adventures should come his way. Finally, as old Plato used to say, 'with great difficulty he agreed' ; and that was how it was that a bright June afternoon found us walking together along the low sand-hills which border, but do not protect, the coast of Norfolk a few miles north of Yarmouth.

It was the third day of our tour. On the first we had been content with running to Norwich in my Morris-Oxford, and refreshing our memories of the old city. The next day we had poked about among the Broads, and ended up at Yarmouth, where we decided to leave the car behind and walk in a leisurely fashion right round the coast to King's Lynn, zigzagging inland to look at an old church or village as we felt inclined.

This afternoon we were walking through a region sparsely populated enough. It was a part where the sea was still steadily eating away the land, and in the memory of man whole villages had vanished. Already we had inspected the ruins of an old church, still lying strewn about the beach, where, we were told, the parson still preached one sermon yearly in order to maintain his right to the stipend. That left behind, we were walking along a very low range of sand-cliffs. One solitary house was in sight, perched on the very edge, and some miles ahead we could see the big black and white bulk of a lighthouse, and behind it a tall churchtower.

"Upon my word, Michael," said Wilson, "I've got a thirst. A drink, or even a cup of tea, would come in mighty handy." He took out the map. "There doesn't appear to be a village nearer than that lighthouse, and that's a good three miles. There's a small place called Happisburgh just behind it, where that church tower is."

I, too, looked at the map. "There seem to be a few houses half a mile or so inland," I said. "We might get something at one of them."

"Better push on," said Wilson. "There's sure to be a pub in the village. And the only house in our immediate neighbourhood doesn't look at all hospitable." He pointed to the lonely building on the edge of the cliff ahead.

Most certainly it did not. We had come a good deal nearer while we were talking and could now see that it was no longer a house at all, but only its skeleton. More than half of it had slid right down

off the edge on to the beach below ; and the remainder stood desolate—roof and windows gone, with heaps of broken brickwork lying as they had fallen. The door was boarded up ; but an intruder could have readily walked in through broken wall or window.

“That looks a little more promising,” I said, pointing to a bell-tent which had just come into view round the corner of the deserted house. “If there are campers there, they will at any rate tell us the lie of the land.”

“There’s quite a village of them beyond,” said Wilson. “It looks to me like a boy scouts’ camp, or something of the sort. Now’s our chance, Michael, of giving one of them an opportunity for his daily good deed. The Good Samaritan up to date, you know.”

“I don’t see a soul about,” I answered.

By this time, we had come abreast of the ruined cottage, and within twenty yards or so of the solitary tent. The scouts’ camp, if it was so, still lay a good half mile ahead on the opposite side of a track which ran down to the beach through a gap in the cliffs. It looked very white and trim, with the sun upon it, whereas the tent nearer to us, even in the bright sunshine, still looked dirty and somehow forlorn. We passed the ruin and went towards it. Not a soul appeared. The tent flap was waving idly about in the light wind ; and, as we came up to it, we saw the remains of a fire before it, scattered broadcast by the wind, and a number of cooking utensils and other miscellaneous objects lying about.



"Slovenly people, these campers," said Wilson. "Apparently there's no one here; but we may as well make sure." So saying, he strode up to the tent opening and looked in. A minute later he withdrew his head. "You have a look too," he said.

The inside of the tent was in wild disorder. In two places the canvas had come away from the ground, and the wind had been blowing freely through the interior. Bedclothes and a few garments were flung about here and there in confusion. Moreover, it looked as if the rain had got in; for many of the things were wet and sodden, though the tent itself appeared quite dry. There was, however, on the farther side a long tear in the canvas, and through this a shaft of sunlight was streaming in.

"Well, Michael, any deductions?" my companion asked, as I turned away.

"Only that any sensible camper would have sewn up that hole, pegged the tent down, and put out his bedclothes in the sun to dry."

"True, O sage. And, from the fact that these campers didn't, what do you conclude?"

"It looks as if they weren't here last night."

"Because it hasn't rained since yesterday, you mean?"

"Yes," I answered. "Those things must have got wet at least eighteen hours ago. No one could have slept in them in that state."

"True," said Wilson, "and equally, nobody would have left them in that state if he had been here since the weather turned fine. Ergo, these

campers left here before last night, and presumably in a hurry, since they didn't even stop to straighten things up, or close the tent-flap. Queer campers, Michael. Now, why were they in such a devil of a hurry? It's not natural." He stood, pondering.

"Hanged if I know. Perhaps they were catching a train."

Wilson strode round the little encampment. Suddenly he stopped. "Hullo!" he said. "You see that bucket."

"Yes; what about it?"

"Orly that there isn't any water in it."

"Why should there be?"

"My dear Michael, it rained heavily last night. A regular downpour. If that bucket had been standing there then, it wouldn't have been dry now."

"You mean it shows they were here after it turned fine. Perhaps they went away in a hurry just after the rain stopped."

"At midnight? To catch a train? Hardly."

"Somebody else may have been here and put the bucket there since."

"Perhaps," said Wilson. He seemed to be hardly listening. Instead, he was poking about among the scattered remains of the fire. "Eh? What's this?"

"Come off it," I said. "I've not brought you here to practise detecting why a pair of campers didn't wash up the dinner things. It's none of our business, thank heaven!"

"No," said Wilson, hesitatingly, and with a faint note of interrogation in his voice. "But this is interesting, all the same." He held out for my

inspection what looked like the charred fragment of a penny note-book.

I took it from him. "Why," I exclaimed, "it's a bit of the butt-end of somebody's cheque-book."

"It is; and somebody has been kind enough to leave the number of the cheques all ready for identification."

"I suppose a man may burn the butt-end of his cheque-book if he likes."

"But he doesn't usually burn the butt-ends of several different cheque-books over a camp-fire during his holidays." Raking among the ashes, he had disinterred what were clearly the ends of two other cheque-books. In both, the numbering of the cheques was intact.

"You know, Michael," Wilson went on "this is really extraordinarily odd."

"Damn it, man, come away before you find any more mare's nests."

Wilson chuckled. "Mare's nests? Is this a mare's nest? That's exactly what I'm wondering, my dear fellow. It might be a singularly appropriate name. Let's have another look in here." This time he dived right into the tent. Peering in, I saw him carefully turning over the various objects which lay strewn about it. Presently he gave a long whistle. "Look here," he said.

I looked. He was holding up a sheet on which, unmistakably, there was a long stain of blood. That it was blood I had no doubt. But it looked, not as if someone had bled upon the sheet, but as if some sharp, bloodstained implement had been

wiped clean upon it. There were little tears in the midst of the stain, as if the sharp edge had cut into the fabric. "What do you make of that?" Wilson asked. I told him. "Right first time," he observed. "Is my medical adviser still of opinion that these campers' affairs are none of our business?"

I could no longer deny it. "If they are," I said, "let me report it to the local police, while you clear out before you get involved. You've got to rest."

"My dear Michael, I ask you. You bring me to this desolate spot, and walk me straight into the middle of a mystery. To begin with, I'm human; and secondly, this is evidently the hand of fate. Never flout Providence, Michael; she knows better even than my doctor what is good for me."

I shrugged my shoulders helplessly. "May it be a mare's nest," I said, "and may you quickly find the eggs."

"I've just found something; but it's not an egg." He held up his hand, and in it was a long, sharp steel blade, still unrusted.

"The weapon," I gasped.

Wilson laughed. "So doubting Thomas believes at last," he said. "Precisely—the weapon. All we require now is the corpse."

"It doesn't follow there is a corpse," I objected. "Even if you strike a man with a knife, you don't always kill him."

"A profoundly surgical observation, doctor. But we may as well see if there is a corpse all the same. At any rate, there seems to be—or to have been—a fair amount of blood about." He went to

the back of the tent and showed me on a patch of sand a large dark stain which had soaked deeply into the ground. "The man who lost all that blood, Michael, didn't dash off at top speed to catch a train. Let's have another look round."

He dived into the tent, and reappeared, carrying a Norfolk coat, a pair of gray flannel trousers, and an exceedingly dirty shirt. These he proceeded carefully to examine.

"Well," I said at last, "what are the conclusions?"

"They are fairly obvious. The shirt is marked 'H.P.' Inside the pocket of the coat is a tailor's label, which announces it as the property of Alec Courage, Esq., St. Mary's Mansions, S.W.1. It is a large coat, obviously made for a fat, but fairly short man. The trousers, on the other hand, were made for a thin man, and bear no mark. Either they belong to 'H.P.', the owner of the shirt, who, by the way, may also be identifiable by his laundry mark, or they are the property of some third person unknown. We will give 'H.P.', for the present, the benefit of the doubt. We have thus the traces of two men, one fat and one thin, and we have good reason for believing that we know the name of one and the initials of the other. Beyond that, there are a few obvious indications. The large man is a heavy smoker, and in the habit of carrying tobacco loose in the pocket. The small man keeps a car or motor-cycle—for there are numerous petrol and grease stains on his trousers, and they are of very varying age. He has the habit of keeping his hands in his trousers pockets, and he has something wrong

with his left leg. There are other inferences ; but for the present they seem unimportant. It is to be observed that there are no papers of any sort in either the coat or the trousers."

"I think I follow you so far," I said. "What next?"

"We will now," said Wilson, "look a little farther afield. And the first thing we observe strikes me as distinctly interesting. May I call your attention to the footprints, Michael?"

I looked closely at the trodden sand before the tent and tried to follow what I knew of Wilson's methods. "I can see signs," I said, "of four distinct pairs of feet—or at least I think so." "Good," said Wilson.

"First, there is a large blank impression—with no nails or studmarks or anything. Secondly, there is a rather smaller impression, in which the sole is blank, but the heel is round with a star-shaped figure in the middle. Thirdly, there is a very small pair of marks that might almost have been made by a woman. They are noticeable because of the barred impressions of the soles. And lastly, there is a pair with very large hobnails, or something of the sort. Am I right?"

"Quite right," Wilson answered. "And it can hardly have escaped you that pairs one and two are regularly on top of the others—or that, in fact, the large blank impression is your own crepe-rubber, while the star and the circle belong to me." He held up his foot for my inspection.

"Oh," I said rather ruefully. "Then that leaves

only the other two. And as we have signed our presence so plainly, and there are no other marks, it seems pretty plain that nobody except these two men has been here till we came."

Wilson nodded. "Yes," he said; "that is, since the rain, which would have washed away any previous impressions. But it also follows that these two men have been here since the rain."

"But what about the wet camping clothes?"

"My dear Michael, that was the bucket, not the rain. Someone upset the bucket over them, and then set it upright again. And that was done since the rain, or the bucket would not have been empty. No, what we have proved is that these two men *were* here after the rain, and that they left in a hurry."

Drawing out a piece of paper and a pencil, Wilson made a sketch. "Let us call the small prints 'A,'" he said, and the big hobnails 'B.' Now, here we have 'B's' prints first coming towards the tent up from the road that leads inland from the beach. Then we have again 'B's' prints going in the direction of that ruined cottage, and then returning. You see, he has trodden on one of his own steps just here, and that proves which way he went first. Lastly, on the opposite side, we have again 'B's' prints going away inland, towards that road that comes up from the beach." He cast about for a minute or two. "No," he said, "I can find no other prints at all. 'A' has left none except just in front of the tent, and 'B' only some more just by the tent and these other two lines. It looks, then, as if they were both here at the same time.

We have, however, tracks of 'B' going away, but not of 'A.' Puzzle: where is 'A'?"

"He's not here, at all events."

"True. Now, suppose we try following 'B's' tracks. Towards the cottage first, I think. Study the footprints carefully, and don't walk in them. They are, to say the least, suggestive."

They suggested nothing to me, but I followed obediently. The steps led to a gap in the broken wall. Wilson, who was leading, looked in, and immediately uttered an exclamation.

In the half-room to which the gap in the wall led stood the remains of a deal table. The two walls nearest the sea had collapsed, and one leg of the table was actually standing upon air, protruding over the edge of the cliff. And on the table lay a cap, a walking-stick and a macintosh. The stick lay a little apart, and under it, as under a paper-weight, was a letter. Wilson silently picked it up. It was stuck down, stamped and addressed to George Chalmers, Esq., St. Mary's Mansions, S.W.1.

Wilson held it irresolutely in his hand for a moment. Then he produced a pocket-knife and slowly and carefully worked the blade under the flap. In a few seconds he had the letter open, leaving the envelope to all appearance intact. "I think, in the circumstances, we will take the liberty," he said. A minute later, he handed me the letter.

"Dear George," it ran, "Very sorry to leave you in the lurch, and all that. But you'll find out soon enough why I'd better not live any longer. Forgive me, if you can. Yours, Hugh."



"Suicide!" I said. "But how . . . ?"

Wilson, meanwhile, was leaning over the edge of the cliff, gazing down at something below. "Well?" I asked. "The exhibits are complete," he answered; "item, one body."

I climbed beside him and gazed down. Below us a clump of jejune bushes was growing precariously on the face of the cliff. And among them lay the body of a man, huddled up awkwardly, as it had fallen from the room in which we stood. "I must get down to him," I said.

It was an unpleasant scramble; but I managed it. In a minute or so, I stood beside the body. There was no doubt about the cause of death. The man's throat was slit from ear to ear. "His throat's been cut," I shouted up to Wilson. A minute later he stood beside me, and we gazed down together at the dead man. He was small and fair-haired, not more than thirty years old, with a face almost childishly pretty, but now frozen in a strange look of horror. And he had been dead many hours. There was no doubt of that.

Wilson spoke my thought. "Does a suicide look like that, Michael?" he asked, gravely.

I bent down again, and studied the wound. "This is no suicide," I said. "The man's been murdered."

"Precisely," said Wilson. "Men do not commit suicide by first cutting their throats, and then jumping off a fifty foot cliff into a bush. Do you mean more than that?"

"Yes, I do. That wound is not self-inflicted. The man was seized from behind, and held roughly

by someone who then slit his throat. . . . But . . . what does that letter mean? He said he was committing suicide."

"Or his murderer said it for him," Wilson answered. "But look! What's that?"

In the bush, close by the dead man, lay an open razor, stained with blood. "The weapon," I said.

Wilson smiled grimly. "You said that before," he said. "Two bloodstained weapons are surely an undue allowance for one throat."

"I'm out of my depth," said I.

Wilson by now was bending down and making a search of the body. The murdered man was dressed in a silver gray lounge suit; and from this he quickly extracted a bundle of papers and letters. Among them were two envelopes addressed to "Hugh Parsons, Esq.," at an address in Hampstead. The letters and papers seemed to be purely personal, and, after a cursory examination, Wilson thrust them back into the dead man's pocket. "*Prima facie*," he said, "this appears to be the body of Hugh Parsons, whom we can identify with the 'H.P.' of the shirt we found in the tent and the 'Hugh' of the letter."

"But I don't understand," I said. "This man has been murdered; but he has left a letter announcing his suicide. What's the explanation?"

"On the face of it, there is one obvious answer. Parsons has been murdered, and his murderer has tried to make it look like suicide."

"But the letter?"

"If we are right, then the letter is a forgery.

We can't tell for certain, at present ; but I think we may safely accept the hypothesis of murder. To begin with—we found sufficient reason to suspect a murderous attempt *before* we had even encountered the body or the suggestion of suicide."

"As a suggested suicide," I observed, "it doesn't seem very successful. It didn't deceive you at all."

"Nor could it have deceived anyone for five minutes," Wilson said. "Let's go over the points. First, we have a plain set of footprints leading to and from the cliff. They are not the dead man's. Secondly, there are no footprints of the dead man leading here, though he clearly came, or was brought, here after the rain ; for his body is quite dry, though the ground under him is still damp. Thirdly, we have the traces up at the tent simply shouting 'Murder.' And, fourthly, we have two bloodstained weapons instead of one. No murderer could possibly have thought this arrangement made a plausible suicide. Yet he left it like that. Why ?"

"Perhaps he staged the suicide, and then was surprised before he had time to remove either his own footprints or the traces up at the tent."

"That is possible ; but I don't think it is correct. For we know he wasn't actually surprised. There are no other footprints. Of course, he might have got panic and done a bunk. But he didn't. The steps leading inland from the tent are those of a man walking slowly."

"Then what is the explanation ?"

"Part of it, I think, is clear. The murder was

done just by the tent. Then the murderer carried the body here and staged this absurd suicide. If you remember the tracks, 'B's' stride was shorter, and the impressions of his feet were much deeper when he was coming this way than on his return. That suggests that he was carrying a heavy burden—to wit, the body. What I don't understand is why he didn't clear the traces away. As he left things, he was bound to be seen through. And then, again, you say the wound was obviously not self-inflicted."

"He may not have had medical knowledge enough to know that," I said.

"He must have had enough to know that two weapons were not likely," Wilson said. "And that just deepens the mystery. The thing's so well done in some respects, and so badly in others. Now, why?"

"I'm damned if I know," said I. "Do you?"

"I can think of at any rate one possible explanation," Wilson said, puckering his brow. "But I'm not at all sure that it will work. Anyway, our immediate job, I suppose, is to tell the local police what we've found."

It was not, however, quite our next job. For at this moment a voice—a fresh, young voice—hailed us from above. "Hullo!" it said. "Something wrong here. Bill!" Looking up, we saw two boy scouts staring down at us as we stood beside the body.

"Something very much wrong," said Wilson. "Do either of you boys know this man?"

With extraordinary agility, the two boys clambered down beside us. "It's one of the blokes from that tent up there," he said.

"There were two of them, weren't there?" Wilson inquired.

"Three. Leastways, two of them was campin' out 'ere, and there was a friend of theirs stayin' at the Bear and Cross."

"Where's that?"

"'Bout a mile inland, up the track. 'E 'ad a car wiv 'im, and used to 'drive it down 'ere."

"When did you last see any of them?"

"Mr. Chalmers—'e's the chap with the car—ain't seen him for two or three days. But I seen the other two night before last. Quarrellin', they was. Oo! D'yer think t'other chap done this one in?"

"Somebody's done him in," said Wilson. "Now, mind, nothing up here or at the tent must be touched till the police come. But I've a job for you chaps. I want you to hunt all down this bit of cliff and see if you can find anything that might throw more light on this affair. And, Michael, I've a job for you too. I'm going to stay here till help comes. But I want you to buzz off and find the nearest telephone, and get straight on to the police station at Norwich. Tell them I'm here, and they're to send an inspector and some men out in a car at once. See? And then go to the Bear and Cross, and see if this Mr. Chalmers is still about, or what's become of him. And find out anything you can about those two fellows down at the tent. When that's done, come back here, and, if you value your life, don't forget to bring a couple of bottles of beer and some sandwiches."

By the time we had clambered up to the ruined

cottage, several more boy scouts had appeared on the scene. Wilson at once took command, and set them to hunt the entire neighbourhood for clues. One was assigned to me as guide to the Bear and Cross, where, it appeared, the nearest telephone was to be found. As I left the scene of the crime, I saw Wilson neatly covering the tell-tale footsteps with a blanket taken from the tent.

At the Bear and Cross, I found no difficulty in carrying out Wilson's suggestions. In the presence of a gaping landlord, to whom I had given the barest minimum of information, I rang up the police station at Norwich, and was lucky enough to get through at once. A recital of the main facts sufficed to secure a promise that an inspector should be despatched at once to the scene of the crime, and, as soon as I mentioned Wilson's name, there was no mistaking the alacrity with which the local police took up the case. But I did not want to waste time; and as soon as I could, I rang off, and turned my attention to the landlord.

He seemed a typical country innkeeper enough—an ex-soldier by the look of him, and indeed I soon found he had been a sergeant in a regular regiment before the war and had seen plenty of service in France. His great desire was to question me; but I speedily made it plain that I meant to get more information than I gave, and before long I had him talking.

The two campers in the tent—Hugh Parsons and Alec Courage—had been there for about ten days, and had had their letters sent to the inn. The

previous week-end, a friend of theirs, named George Chalmers, had come down with his car, and had put up at the inn. He had stayed only a few days, and had returned to town on Tuesday, leaving the other two behind. The two campers had been before his coming regular visitors at the inn; and during the week-end they had been there more than ever, and Chalmers had several times taken them out in his car—a Morris-Oxford. Three days ago, on Tuesday afternoon, Chalmers had received a telegram, and on receipt of it had announced that he must go back to town at once. The other two had been with him when it came, and they had stayed to take a farewell drink together and to see him off. The last the landlord had seen of them was their going off arm in arm, and a little unsteadily (for it had been a wet leave-taking) along the track towards the sea. He had been rather surprised to see nothing of them for the past three days; for previously they had been frequent and thirsty visitors at the inn. But it was quite possible that, now their friend was no longer there, they had transferred their attention to the Swan at Happingburgh. It was only a couple of miles or so from their camp.

At my suggestion the landlord rang up the Swan, and found that his surmise was correct. The two men had spent the greater part of Wednesday there, drinking and playing billiards and strumming on the piano—for the day had been wet. They had also walked over together on Thursday afternoon, and stayed for a drink and a game. The

Swan, however, had seen nothing of them since then, and it was now late on Friday afternoon. There were, I ascertained, no other licensed premises within several miles. This seemed to bear out the conclusion already formed that the murder had taken place some time on Thursday night.

"What sort of man was Courage?" I asked. The landlord's view was, that he was a bit of a sport—an athlete, too, by his talk; shortish, but very strongly and sturdily built, with curly dark hair and a small moustache—about thirty years of age.

"We found a queer-looking long knife down at the tent," I said; "a very thin, sharp blade about eight inches long, with a white bone handle. Do you know it?"

"Why," said the landlord, staring. "I shouldn't wonder if it was my ham and beef knife. I lost it on Tuesday after those chaps were here. You don't mean it was——"

"It may have been the weapon," I said. "Anyway, it's at the tent now. One of them must have picked it up. Could they have got at it easily?"

"It was kept in a drawer in the parlour, where they were all sitting. And, now you mention it, I remember Mr. Courage went back in there after Mr. Chalmers had driven off. He may have taken it then."

"When did you see it last?"

"When I put it back in the drawer after lunch on Tuesday. When I wanted it on Wednesday morning it wasn't there."

"Any of them could have taken it?"



"It must 'a' been Mr. Courage, when he went back into the parlour."

That was the sum of the information I gleaned ; but, as I made my way back to the scene of the tragedy, accompanied by the boy scout bearing a plentiful supply of Bass and sandwiches, I felt well enough pleased with it. It all seemed to fit in ; and especially the theft of the knife from the inn seemed to prove that the crime had been premeditated for at least two days before its actual execution. Parsons was dead, and Courage was presumably his murderer. Else why had the man vanished off the face of the earth ? Courage, too, was proved to have had ample opportunity for stealing the knife. Things certainly looked black for Mr. Alec Courage.

I found Wilson the centre of an excited group of boy scouts, among whom was a man, dressed as a scoutmaster, whom I had not seen before. Wilson hailed me cheerily, and, seizing a bottle of Bass from my companion, took a long pull. "That's better," he said.

I told my news, which seemed to please him, while he hungrily ate a sandwich. "We've some news too," he said, "and it's rather curious. To begin with, Mr. Evanson here knows a bit about our two friends."

The scoutmaster proceeded to explain. He and Courage had been at school together ; but they had not met for years until their accidental encounter a few days before. Indeed, Mr. Evanson gave it clearly to be understood that, in his view, Courage

was a good deal of a bad hat. Meeting, however, by chance on the beach, they had renewed their old acquaintance and exchanged experiences. Courage had introduced Parsons to him, and explained that they were partners in a firm of outside brokers in the City. Evanson had gathered that their business was highly speculative; indeed, they had spoken of it in the spirit of gamblers who enjoyed playing for high stakes. He had met Chalmers once at the Bear and Cross, and gathered that he was the senior partner in the concern.

On the tragedy itself Evanson could throw no direct light. He said he had last spoken with the two friends on Thursday afternoon, when they were going down to the sea for a bathe. They had told him of Chalmers's return to town, and had announced that they were staying on at least for another week. They had seemed in the best of spirits and on excellent terms with each other.

That was the end of Evanson's direct evidence. But he produced one of his boys, who had been in the neighbourhood of the tent later on Thursday evening. The boy said that he had heard high voices, as of two men quarrelling, proceeding from the tent, and had caught some words about "a tight place" and "letting a pal down." The boy had not thought much of it at the time, and had, in fact, forgotten all about it till the discovery of the tragedy brought the incident back to his mind.

Evanson's story seemed to me quite straightforward. He gave of Courage a most unflattering portrait, which showed that he thought him quite

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the sort of man who might be guilty of a serious crime. Of Parsons he seemed to know little, but to regard him as in all probability a harmless "pigeon" who had fallen into Courage's skilful hands. But I, at any rate, was disposed to discount a good deal of Mr. Evanson's testimony; for it was obvious that he was more than a bit of a prig.

"Come over here, Michael," said Wilson; "there's something I want to look at again."

"Anything fresh since I went away?" I asked, as soon as we were alone.

"Yes and no," was the answer. "You know those footprints of 'B' leading inland from the tent?" I nodded. "Well, there's an odd thing about them. You remember I said that Mr. 'B's' stride was shorter and his footmarks deeper on the way to the ruined cottage than back?" Again I nodded acquiescence. "Well, those steps leading inland from the tent are the same as those leading to the cottage—short and deep."

"I don't quite see what you mean," I said.

"I concluded from the first lot of footsteps that 'B' had been carrying a heavy burden going to the cottage, but not on his return. That squared with our finding the body on the cliffs below the cottage. But how does it square with our finding the same sort of footsteps—deep, and close together—leading from the tent in the opposite direction?"

"It doesn't seem to square at all," I said. "Where do the other footsteps lead, by the way?"

"They go to the road leading to the inn; and

there they stop. The road surface is too hard to leave an impression."

"Then you simply don't know where 'B' went after he reached the road?"

"That's where those boy scouts come in. I set them to search, and one of them says he's found some of 'B's' footsteps again a bit farther up the road, leading off into a disused path that apparently runs along parallel to the cliffs. I've had no chance to follow it yet; but the boy says the tracks are quite plain. Hullo, that must be the police!"

A car was running swiftly down the road that led from the Bear and Cross to the sea. In it were two policemen and a man in plain clothes. Wilson went to meet the car, and it came to a stop about a hundred yards from the tent. I hung in the background while the plain clothes man deferentially saluted Wilson. They remained a minute or two in conversation, and then came over towards me. "This is Inspector Davey," said Wilson. "My friend, Dr. Prendergast."

In a few minutes Wilson had given the local inspector a full account of what we had so far discovered. "We'll leave you to look round here," he said then, "while we follow up these footsteps." But we were not destined to follow them just yet; for, as we turned to leave the inspector, a second car appeared, coming at full speed along the road from the Bear and Cross. "Hullo, who's this?" said the inspector.

The second car—a new Morris-Oxford—came to a stop beside the police car, and its sole occupant.

a tall, broad man of forty or so, came hastily towards us. "What the devil's all this?" he said. "My name's Chalmers. They told me up at the pub there was something wrong."

The inspector glanced at Wilson. "You are Mr. George Chalmers," said the latter.

"Yes. Is it true that Parsons is dead?" The big man seemed greatly agitated.

"He was a friend of yours?" Wilson asked.

"My partner—he and Mr. Courage, who was staying here with him. I've just run down from town to see them, and they told me at the inn . . ."

"What did they tell you?"

"That Parsons was dead, and Courage had disappeared. Is that true? What has happened?"

"Mr. Parsons left this letter for you, Mr Chalmers," said Wilson, handing over the note which we had found at the ruined cottage. "We took the liberty of opening it."

Chalmers took the note, and read it with puckered brows. "I don't understand," he said. "The landlord said Parsons had been murdered. But that means suicide. Though why——"

"You do not know of any reason why Mr. Parsons should have taken his life?"

"The thing's preposterous. Now, if it had been Courage, I might have understood. This is the devil of a business. I say, I suppose anything I tell you won't go any further—I mean, unless it has to, you know."

"I think," said Wilson, "you had better tell us frankly all you know, Mr. Chalmers."

"It's a beastly business," said Chalmers, "and I don't understand it at all. You realise, Parsons and Courage were my partners—we're stockbrokers, you know. Ten days ago, the two of them came away here on a holiday together, leaving me to run the show in town while they were away. Last Friday, my bank manager asked me to come round and see him. I went, and he produced a cheque, drawn to bearer for a very large sum on the firm's account, and asked me if it was all right. It was signed with Courage's name and mine. I told him at once the damned thing was a forgery and I'd never signed any such cheque. It was a damned good forgery, mind you; and I could hardly tell the signature from my own. Well, to cut a long story short, we went into the accounts, and we found that during the past week several other bearer cheques had been paid out, all purporting to be signed by Courage and me—and all forgeries, so far as my signature was concerned at any rate. Of course, I was in the devil of a stew—I may tell you the cheques were big enough to cause our firm serious embarrassment. We rang up the police at once and put the matter in their hands, and then I went back to the office, collected the cheque-books in which the counterfoils were, and buzzed off down here with them to see Courage. Of course, I assumed his signature had been forged as well as mine.

"Well, over the week-end, we had a tremendous confab about it. Courage said he'd never signed the cheques, and couldn't give any explanation. But we knew the cheque-books had been locked up

in a safe to which only we three had the keys. Finally, Courage and Parsons fell out about it, and accused each other of forging the cheques. I trusted them both, and told them it was all nonsense, and at length they made it up and shook hands. I stayed down here till Tuesday, keeping in telephonic communication with London all the time. Then, on Tuesday, I got a wire from the office, asking me to go up to town at once over some important business. And now comes the beastly part of the affair. I had to go to Courage's desk for some papers this morning, and there I found, in his blotting book, some unmistakable transfers of a series of attempts at my signature. Of course, that put the lid on it. I simply buzzed down here at once; and I don't mind telling you I meant to cut my losses and advise Courage to make himself scarce. We've been close friends, and I'd sooner lose all I have than have to put him in the dock over it. You can say that's compounding a felony if you like. Anyway, it's what I meant to do. I got to the Bear and Cross a few minutes ago, and there the landlord told me Parsons was dead and Courage vanished. Of course, I was dumbfounded. Forgery's one thing; but murder's another. I came right on here to tell you all I know. But, of course, if it's suicide . . . though why on earth . . . " His voice tailed away.

"It was not suicide, Mr. Chalmers," said Wilson. "It was murder. The suicide was merely a clumsy pretence. The murderer burned, or endeavoured to burn, the butt-ends of the cheque-books, and then

made off." And in a few words he told Chalmers the state of the affair.

Chalmers seemed more and more downcast. "I'd never have believed it," he said at the close.

"Well, what's your conclusion now?" Wilson asked.

"I've no wish to draw conclusions. Unfortunately, they seem too obvious."

"You mean that Courage killed Parsons and fled. But why should he kill Parsons?"

"I suppose Parsons must have found out that he had forged the cheques. He killed him in order to shut his mouth, and then got panic and ran away."

"Parsons, you think, was entirely innocent?"

"Lord bless you, yes. Hugh Parsons had nothing to do with this. No, it was Courage who forged the cheques, sorry as I am to say it."

"Well, Mr. Chalmers, will you kindly go with the inspector here and identify Parsons, and give him any help you can?" Wilson drew the inspector aside and communed with him a moment.

"Now, Michael," he said. "*A nos moutons.*" We waited until Inspector Davey and Chalmers had disappeared into the ruined cottage, and then set off up the road. "About here is where the boy found the footprints," said Wilson. "Yes, here they are. He's a sharp lad."

The footprints were rather faint; but there was no doubt that they had been made by the same boots as the 'B' prints by the tent. There were only two or three of them visible, for the track was loose sand, and so overgrown that the rain had only penetrated at one or two points. But it was quite



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clear that they were leading away from the tent along a sunken lane which ran parallel to the shore and about a hundred yards from it, and was screened from view by a thick covering of bushes on either side. We walked along the track for a little distance. I could see no further marks ; but Wilson's more experienced eyes seemed to be satisfied that he was still on the trail. Eventually, after about five minutes' walking, the lane came out on a wider track leading on one side up to the main road inland, and on the other still keeping roughly parallel to the shore.

"Hullo!" said Wilson. "There's been a car here. You notice the tracks. And just here it stood for some time. You can see the oil ran down and made a little pool. Dunlop tyres, with a noticeable patch on the left back wheel. That may come in useful. The tracks run both ways—up to the road, and in the other direction—a double track each way. Left turn, I think." He led the way along the track, away from the main road.

For some distance we followed the track, which, though wider here, was still sunken. Marks were few and far between ; but Wilson seemed sure that we were still following the trail of the car. After about a mile the track bent round in the direction of the shore, and within five minutes brought us out, through another gap in the low cliffs, right on the beach, and within a few yards of the ruined church we had already visited earlier in the day. No tyre marks were visible on the beach ; either the wind had obliterated them all from the loose sand, or,

if the car had descended below high-water mark, the tide had been up and washed them away. But Wilson strode unhesitatingly towards the ruin, which stood well above high-water mark, temporarily protected by a range of low artificial sand-hills planted with juniper. There he paused and stared meditatively at the bushes.

"What on earth do you expect to find here?" I asked.

"Who knows," he returned. "One can but look."

"But for what?"

"For what one may find. Look here, for instance." I looked, but could see nothing but the sandy soil between the ruins. "Trampled ground," Wilson interpreted. "And recently trampled. But someone's obliterated all clear marks. Anyway, we might as well experiment there as anywhere. Prod with your stick." So saying, he began prodding with his own, thrusting it in as deep as it would go into the sand at one place after another. I followed his example. In some places the stick, with a little coaxing, went right down. In others, it was speedily stopped by something hard below the surface. "Never mind the hard stuff," said Wilson. "That's masonry from the church. Try for something soft but resistant." A minute or so later he gave an exclamation. "This feels like something, Michael," he said. "Come and help me clear away the sand."

With sticks and hands we cleared away the loose sand as best we could. Less than a foot down, my hand caught hold of something hard but yielding.

Together we scraped for a moment and brought to light a human boot. Another followed, and within a few minutes we had exposed to view the entire body of a man, buried a foot deep below the drifting sand. He was a young man, short but stout and strongly built, with a crisp black moustache, and to all appearances not long dead. And the manner of death was evident. Round his neck a cord had been tightly knotted, and the stained and swollen flesh plainly showed the marks.

I had been too occupied first in scraping away the sand and then in making a brief inspection of the body to give vent to my curiosity till now. But when I had assured myself how the man had died, I turned to Wilson. "What in God's name does this mean?" I cried. "Was this what you were looking for?"

"Permit me to introduce you to the suspected murderer, Mr. Courage," he said.

"Courage!" I exclaimed. "Then who . . ."

But a sharp exclamation from Wilson cut short my sentence. He had turned the body over, and now from beneath it he drew—a big gold cigar case, which gleamed brightly in the evening sun. He pressed the catch and the case flew open. Within were two fat cigars, and with them a scrap of paper—a tearing from a newspaper. Wilson read it and passed it to me. It was an extract from the city page of the *Financial Times*, describing the dramatic slump in the shares of the Anglo-Asiatic Corporation.

"From yesterday's paper," said Wilson. "Yesterday's, mark you."

"Why not?" I asked.

"The *Financial Times* is hardly likely to be on sale at Habbisburgh," he answered. "This grave was made last night, or at all events the man died then. How did a bit of yesterday's *Financial Times* get into his grave?"

"It may have come by post," I hazarded.

"We can probably find out whether he received any newspapers by post. The question is whether this is his cigar case or someone else's. If it's someone else's, we're in luck."

"But how did it get into the grave?"

"Do you ever dig, Michael? If you do, and don't take precautions to secure your loose property, as likely as not you'll drop some of it, and cover it over before you find out your loss. If the murderer has been kind enough to drop his cigar case for us, I say we're in luck. And I'm inclined to think he has. Judging from Mr. Courage's coat which we inspected at the tent, he was a pipe, and not a cigar smoker."

"But how do you know this is Courage?"

For answer, Wilson bent down and felt in the dead man's pockets. They were entirely empty. "I don't," he said at last. "But I'll bet you anything you like it is. You see, I've been looking for him."

"You suspected—this?" I asked.

"Certainly. It was plain from the first that we were meant to see through the pretence of suicide—plain that the murderer had meant us to see through it. But, once we did see through it, all the surface

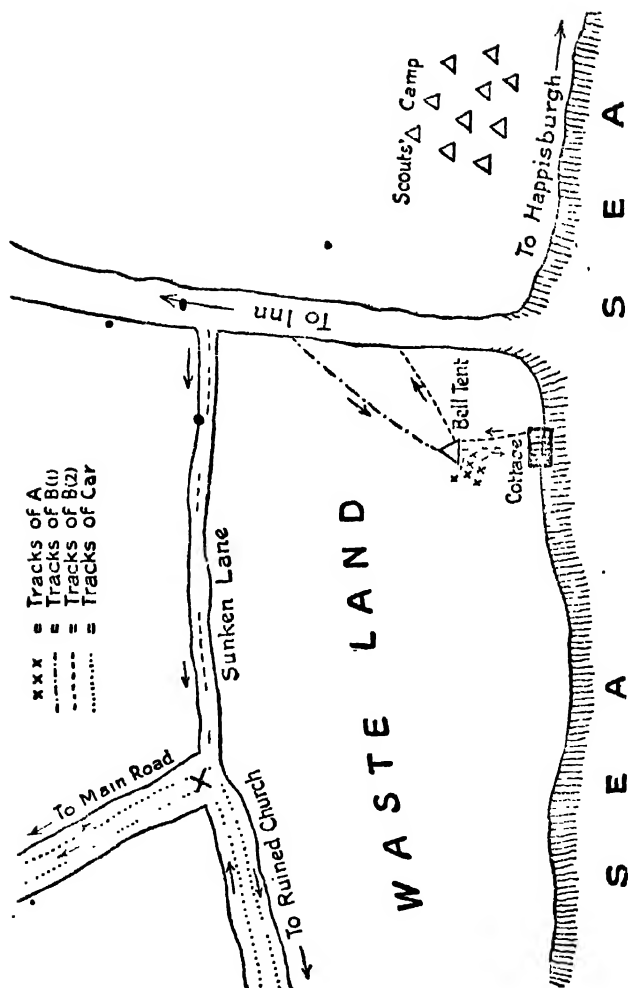
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indications pointed to Courage as the murderer. Clearly that would not do. If Courage had been the murderer, either he would not have wanted us to see through the suicide, or he would have arranged that, when we did see through it, the clues should not point to him. Ergo, Courage was not the murderer. Then where was Courage, and why had he disappeared? One possible explanation was that he had taken fright and run away, even though he was innocent of the murder. But a far more plausible theory was that he had been murdered too.

"That theory was confirmed by a study of the footprints. We concluded, on good evidence, that the murderer had been carrying a heavy burden on his way from the tent to the ruined cottage. We found we were right. He had been carrying Parsons. But we had equally good evidence that he was carrying a burden in the second set of footprints leading to the car; for they too were deep, and showed a shortened stride. The inference was clear. The murderer had also been carrying a body towards the car. But that body could not be Parsons. Who was it? Obviously Courage himself."

I listened to this convincing deduction with increasing amazement. At this point I broke in. "But his boots, man! Look at his boots!" For the boots on the feet of the body before us were identical with the 'B' tracks we had found, at the tent.

"I have looked at his boots," said Wilson. "That is the final link in the argument. We found three sets of 'B' footprints, did we not? One set



led up from the shore to the tent, a second from the tent to the ruined cottage and back again, and the third from the tent to the path we have just followed." I nodded. "Very well," said Wilson. "Now observe that the left boot on the body has two nails missing. If you go back to the tent, you'll find that of our 'B' footprints, set number one has those two nails missing; sets numbers two and three have not. This man's boots have two nails missing. Otherwise, the tracks are the same." Now, do you see<sup>1</sup>?"

"You never told me that," I said reproachfully.

"You looked at them just as much as I did," said the provoking fellow. "Can you now tell me what they mean?"

"Mr. 'B' was two men," I said, rather sulkily. "And only one of them is Courage."

"Precisely. Two men with almost identical boots—but fortunately not quite identical. Does that suggest anything to you?"

"Only a very odd coincidence, I'm afraid. And, of course, the fact that we have to look for a new murderer."

"Yes," said Wilson. "Perhaps we'd better start."

Wilson left me to watch by the body while he went back to the tent to inform the police and summon assistance. But hardly had he left me when the scoutmaster, Evanson, appeared, scrambling down the cliff by a narrow path. I did not quite know what to do; for Wilson had said that he was

<sup>1</sup> See map, p. 69.

particularly anxious, for the present, to keep the finding of the second body a secret. But I did not see how I could keep the new-comer away. I went towards him in the hope of heading him off.

"What were you two doing here?" he asked. "I happened to notice you from the path above and I thought I'd come down and see if you had found anything fresh. Have you?"

"I'm afraid," I said, "I'm hardly at liberty . . ."

Evanson laughed. "Official secrets, eh? I'm sure I've no desire to pry. But, while I am here, I want to have a look at these ruins. Any objection?"

"Well," I said, "if you don't mind . . ."

At this moment his hat, lifted by a gust of wind, went flying along the beach. He followed it, and, with some dismay, I watched the chase end within a few feet of the shallow hole in which the body lay. I ran after him.

"My God! What's this?" I heard him say. "Courage!"

I came up, panting. "Well, Mr. Evanson, since you have seen this, I must ask you not to say a word about it to anybody. It is most important that no one should——"

"But Courage! I thought Courage was the murderer."

"If he was, Nemesis has soon overtaken him"

"How did you find him? Who——?"

I was scarcely able to answer; for suddenly, on the firm sand, I had noticed the print of the scout-master's feet. They were, to say the least, extraordinarily like the 'B' footprints we had seen at



the tent, and tracked to the lonely grave in the sand. And they were a perfect impression, without a nail missing. "We tracked him here," I said.

Evanson clearly noticed something odd in my manner, for he looked at me strangely. I did my best not to show my excitement; and I flattered myself that, after my first start of astonishment, I managed pretty well. Evanson went on plying me with questions, direct and indirect; and I did my best to make answers that sounded innocent, and at the same time gave nothing away. The man was not to know I suspected him if I could help it. But it was wearing work; and I was mightily relieved when the police car came rumbling down the track and the local inspector leapt out beside us.

"Thank you, doctor, for keeping watch for us. I see Mr. Evanson is here. Does he recognise the body?"

"It is Courage," said Evanson. "But I thought . . ."

"Lord bless you, sir, we all thought. In a case like this, one's apt to think a lot of the wrong things before thinking of the right one. And now, you won't mind leaving me to manage this little affair myself. The superintendent says he would like to see you at the inn, doctor."

I had been hesitating whether or not to tell the inspector of my discovery. But it seemed best to keep it for Wilson's ear. "Are you coming back towards the tent?" I asked the scoutmaster.

Evanson shook his head. "No, I'm going a bit farther along the shore," he answered. I wondered

if Wilson would blame me for letting him go ; but on the whole that seemed preferable to giving my knowledge away. I left him, and set off at a smart pace towards the inn.

There, the sound of voices attracted me to the sitting-room. I found Wilson there with George Chalmers. Eagerly I asked Wilson to let me speak to him for a moment alone. He came out at once, and I told him what I had found, and expressed my fear that Evanson might even now be making his escape. To my chagrin, I found that my news was no news to him. "Yes," he said, "I noticed Evanson's boots when we were talking to him by the ruined cottage. But I don't think he'll run away, all the same." He smiled.

"Not now he knows the other body has been found?"

"I think we'll chance it," said Wilson, leaving me to wonder whether he had really something up his sleeve, or whether in this case he was not quite up to the mark. Sadly disappointed, and more than a little perplexed, I followed him back into the room, where Chalmers was still sitting.

"I've just been getting Mr. Chalmers to give me all the particulars about this man Courage," he said. "For purposes of offering a reward for his apprehension, you know." I took the hint. Chalmers was to know nothing yet of the discovery of Courage's body.

"Now, Mr. Chalmers," Wilson went on. "You say Courage and Parsons quarrelled badly over the week-end, but had made it up before you left."

" Yes."

" Since you went away, have you either heard from, or communicated with, either of them ? "

" No."

" Is there any way you can think of in which either could have got to know what you have since discovered about Courage ? "

" Impossible. I only found it out myself this morning."

" But it is possible Mr. Parsons may have found out somehow for himself ? "

" Yes, that's possible. But I don't see how."

" Then how do you explain what happened ? "

" I don't like having to explain it at all. But I fear the facts speak for themselves."

At this point Wilson's tone suddenly changed. " Was your firm in Anglo-Asiatics, Mr. Chalmers ? " he said sharply.

Chalmers gave a violent start, and seemed unable to make up his mind what to answer. " I don't see what bearing——" he began.

" I only asked," said Wilson sweetly, " because I noticed you cut out that bit about it from Wednesday's *Financial Times*."

" What the devil d'you mean ? "

" Well, you did, didn't you ? "

" Certainly not," Chalmers snapped.

" You see," said Wilson, " I thought you had, because we found the cutting in your cigar case. This is yours, isn't it ? " He passed the heavy gold case across the table.

Chalmers stared down at it as if the opulent little

object were a snake. "Yes," he said, "that's mine. I must have left it behind here on Tuesday."

"Oh, no, I think not, Mr. Chalmers. The landlord here saw you take it out, and light a cigar just as you started the car. And he is sure you put it back in your pocket."

"He's mistaken. I must have left it behind at the tent, or it couldn't have been found there."

"It wasn't found at the tent, Mr. Chalmers. It was found on the sands beside the old ruined church at Eccles. Does that refresh your memory?"

This time there was no mistaking Chalmers' consternation. His hand shook so violently that he knocked the cigar case to the floor with a clatter.

"What! Oh, I—I walked that way on Tuesday. I must have dropped it then."

"With a cutting from Wednesday's *Financial Times* inside?"

"Somebody must have found the case, and put the cutting in, and dropped it later."

"It was not dropped. It was buried."

"I—I can only say I have not had it since last Tuesday."

Wilson changed the subject. "On Tuesday, you drove back to London in your car?"

"Yes."

"Where has the car been since then?"

"In my garage, except when I was using it in town."

"It has not been out of your possession?"

"N—no."

"Then, if your car was down here yesterday, we can take it that you were here too. Is that so?"

"It was not here yesterday. I was in London all day."

"Supposing I tell you that you and your car were seen to turn off the main road and stop at a point where two tracks join on the way between here and Eccles, and that subsequently your car was driven down to a point near the church at Eccles, and near where the cigar case was found?"

Chalmers's alarm seemed to increase with every word that Wilson spoke. "It's not true," he said wildly. "I tell you I've not been here since Tuesday."

"Are you aware that your car has a highly distinctive patch on the left back tyre, Mr. Chalmers?"

Chalmers had apparently made up his mind by now what to say. "Look here," he said, "this is a ridiculous misunderstanding. You're quite right. I did drive that way. But it was on Tuesday."

"Come, come, Mr. Chalmers. The marks could not possibly have survived the rain. Will you tell me where you were on Thursday, if you were not here?"

Chalmers sprang up. "That's enough," he said furiously. "I thought third degree methods were confined to the American police. I tell you I have not been near the place since Tuesday last, when I left Parsons and Courage alive and well!"

"And what makes you think Mr. Courage is not alive now?" Wilson asked sharply. Chalmers saw his slip, and made a sudden movement for the door. Opening it, he stepped straight into the arms of a large Norfolk policeman.

"George Chalmers," said Wilson, signing to the policeman, "I arrest you for the murder of Hugh Parsons and Alec Courage. And I warn you that anything you say may be used in evidence against you."

A minute later, when the policeman, assisted by another, had led Chalmers away, I turned to Wilson.

"But what about Evanson's boots?" I cried.

"My dear Michael, what about them? They had the same arrangement of nails—it's a common one—but they were at least a size and a half too small."

"Then it was I after all who discovered the mare's nest."

"I'm afraid it was, Michael," said Wilson gently. "We all do at times."

"I'll get my own back on you when you have that nervous breakdown," said I. But Wilson only laughed.

Of course, Wilson's work did not end with the arrest of Chalmers. We might be as morally certain as we liked that he had murdered both his partners, but proof was another matter. Wilson himself admitted that it was Chalmers's own suspicious manner at the interview just described which had decided him to risk an immediate arrest, rather than give the man the chance of destroying incriminating evidence. And it was as well that he did so; for in Chalmers's rooms at the flat which he shared with Courage in St. Mary's Mansions

were found not only the copy of the *Financial Times* from which the incriminating cutting had been torn, but also a pair of boots, the twin of those on the dead man's feet, except that they had all their nails intact. They were half a size smaller than Chalmers's own footgear, and were still partly covered with Norfolk sand. Thirdly, in the desk, at the back, there turned up a scrap of paper covered with attempts at Courage's signature.

Armed with this last piece of evidence, Wilson interviewed the bank, with the result that the forged bearer cheques were submitted to further expert examination; and it was discovered that, of the two signatures which they bore—those of Courage and Chalmers—the former was really the forgery, though it had been executed so cleverly that no suspicion of it had been entertained by the bank. Chalmers had deliberately so written his own signature that it would be easily recognised as a forgery, whereas he had been at pains to make the imitation of his partner's signature as plausible as possible. This conclusion was borne out by a piece of paper found where it had blown behind the desk in his study. On this he had actually tried out both signatures. This discovery led to a close investigation of Chalmers's affairs, from which it eventually transpired that, having got the firm into serious difficulties through unwarrantable speculation, Chalmers had converted the sums represented by these cheques into bearer securities, which he had retained in preparation for the inevitable collapse.

At this point Courage's solicitor, who had also been his personal friend, disclosed a statement made by the dead man just before leaving for his holiday. In this Courage explained that he had detected a certain amount of irregularity and had eventually connected it with Chalmers. Receiving no satisfactory explanation from the latter, he had taken with him to Norfolk certain of the papers and cheque-books of the firm, with the object of discussing the position fully with Parsons, and deciding on a line of action. (These were the cheque-books whose butt-ends we found at the tent, Chalmers having burnt just enough of them to create additional suspicion and bolster up his own story.)

Even with this evidence the Crown had a hard struggle to get its conviction. Chalmers and his lawyers fought to the very last gasp, blackened Courage's character—which, indeed, was none of the best—and poured scorn on the story reconstructed by Wilson ; namely, that Chalmers, having failed to secure his partners' complicity in his frauds, had decided to murder them both, and then, knowing that suspicion would almost certainly be directed to himself, had staged the clumsy pretence of suicide, which was, of course, intended to lead straight to Courage as the murderer. Even supposing the police did not see through the pretence, Courage's disappearance, together with Chalmers's statements about the forged cheques, would have amply sufficed to throw suspicion on him, and prevent any search for another criminal. What finally clinched the case against Chalmers was,



curiously enough, his own alibi for the fatal night, which he had prepared with care and which very nearly saved him. Eventually, however, the police proved it to be a palpable fraud; the defence collapsed, and Chalmers was hanged.

"The Happisburgh murderer," Wilson said to me one day when the case was over, "illustrates one important point in the science of crime. Chalmers had brains. No one could have planned murder much better than he planned it; but he was a clumsy executant. At every point, he lacked technique. Thus, he failed to make the suicide plausible enough. It was so barefaced a fake that it was obviously meant to be seen through. But, if that was so, one naturally distrusted the obvious explanation of the murder to which it pointed when one saw through it. Then again, he dropped his cigar case, and he failed to obliterate the traces of his car. If he had merely carried Courage's body a short distance and buried it in the sand, and then really carefully obliterated the traces, I very much doubt if we should ever have found it, and then the odds are he would have got off scot-free. No, Michael, a really good criminal needs two things—brains and technique. Chalmers had plenty of brains; but, as an executant, the fellow was a bungler. The combination of brains and technique is fortunately rare—or we policemen should never catch our hares. Which would be a great pity."

I agreed. It was wonderful how well Wilson was looking. Our little holiday in Norfolk had quite set him up.

## THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST

### I

"I SAY, old thing," the younger of the two men said, "I don't want to crab your show, but it seems to me just about as merry as a mothers' meeting. How about slipping off and having one quietly?"

"Rubbish!" his companion retorted. "They won't open for hours yet. Do sit still, Tony; you're like a kid! What did you expect? Battle orders for the revolution read out on a public platform?"

"You didn't say it was going to be nothing but dagoes spouting gibberish," Tony complained.

"Well, that was your own fault," his friend replied. "If you hadn't been a lazy hound and had come in the morning, you'd have heard some fun. The platform had no end of a row with South Wales. They always put the fraternal delegates on in the afternoon, just to sandwich them between the real business. It'll be all right this evening."

"If I'm alive by then and not choked with the filthy stuff your pals smoke," Tony said. "Thank the Lord that's over." The little interpreter, springing up and down like a monkey, had just finished transforming into English a long and highly correct encomium from a Swedish delegate, and sat down amid wearied applause. "Oh, Christ! here's another of them! Who is it, Dick?"

"Julius Grovno," Dick whispered back. "Right wing, from Moldavia. Was Minister of the Interior in the Moldavian Socialist Government, and made himself very unpopular by shooting down strikers. We may have some fun if any of the other side's here."

"Well, at any rate, he's a bit less mouldy looking than some," Tony Redford commented, and leaned back to listen. He was relieved to hear the Moldavian ex-Minister begin his speech in fluent, if rather torrential English. At any rate there would only be one speech to listen to in this case.

He looked lazily round the theatre and wondered for the fifteenth time why he had let Dick Warren persuade him to come as a visitor to the annual conference of the British section of the Social Revolutionary Party. He had wondered, vaguely, what it would be like to hear a large number of people, including members of that working-class far less known to young men at Oxford than a crowd in ancient Athens, debate the strange subjects on which Dick liked to hold forth in the evenings; but so far he had heard nothing but vague and wordy speeches about comradeship which he guessed bored the delegates as much as himself. To add to his irritation, there was a slight but persistent echo which doubled each speaker's already lengthy perorations.

He and Dick were sitting at the extreme end of the dress circle. Beside and below them stretched a sea of faces lit by some unpleasantly glaring arrangement of gas—for this was an old theatre—

and looming greenish through the fog made by innumerable pipes and cigarettes. On the stage, in front of a lilac background decorated with faded nymphs, was a kitchen table with water, glasses and papers, and round it were grouped the Executive Committee and the fraternal delegates, the former mostly lean men between twenty-five and forty, with lined, anxious faces, the latter plumper and inclining to a superfluity of beard and moustache. There were three women, two of the type which the unchivalrous Tony merely noted and pursued no further, the third, who sat rather in the background, more arresting to the attention. She had a broad-brimmed hat drooping over one eye, and a heavy fur coat pulled up nearly to her ears; but between them enough was visible of a clean profile, carved in the clear olive pallor so rarely seen in England, as to make Tony sit up and study her closely.

"It'd be worth while getting that lass to take her hat off," he reflected. "Hullo, she's interested in the old dago."

As Monsieur Grovno, reaching the end of his first paragraph, strode with a sweeping gesture right across the front of the stage, and stood poised for a second at the far end, making the very most of his beautiful Roman features and flowing gray hair, the lady behind him shifted her chair slightly, as if in order to see him better. M. Grovno, almost as if he had heard and noticed, turned his head, and stood a moment with upraised hand, gazing into the farther wings. But only for a moment. Even as he turned, there was a slight movement on

Tony's right ; then came a report which nearly deafened him, a stinging smell in his nostrils, and a cloud, thicker and greener than the cloud of tobacco smoke, swelling slowly from the box at his right hand. As the cloud cleared, he saw the noble figure of the Moldavian Minister reel, strike the kitchen table, and fall sprawling ; while from the box an enormous army pistol protruded itself, and a huge voice uttered what sounded like a triumphal shout in some guttural foreign tongue.

## II

The sound of the voice put an end to the sudden dazed silence that had fallen on the assembly. Instinctively, Tony's eye went first to the lady in the broad-brimmed hat, who, with what he mentally described as "a yowl," flung herself on the prostrate figure. But almost simultaneously pandemonium broke loose in the theatre. On the platform delegates and executive sprang to their feet in confusion, noisily overturning chairs, and muttering in all the tongues of Babel. The chairman's bell rang again and again without effect. In the auditorium there was a confused shouting, cries of "Up there!" "In the box!" "Where are the stewards?" "Where's the door!" "It's Janik!" "Traitors! Well done!" and so on, mingled with the noise of a great many people trying to reach the exits simultaneously. To the left of them men fought and scrambled to get past. Agitated stewards, pale in their red rosettes, rushed to and fro, endeavouring

to hold back, direct, and pass through the crowd all at once, and only making confusion worse confounded.

"Get out, shall we?" Warren asked; but Tony shook his head.

"No, we can't. And, anyway, I want to see what's happening. Listen!"

From beside them the huge voice broke out again and Tony, looking round, could see that it came from a massive man with a beard and a red tie, who was leaning out of the nearby box and gesticulating with the still smoking revolver.

"Comrades!" he shouted, and at the sound the noise lulled for a moment, and comrades paused in their struggling to glance back at his impressive figure. "There is no need for haste. I await you, see! I kill him, that is all I need. I kill Julius Grovno, the traitor, the slayer of his comrades! He speaks of the brotherhood of man, and he shoots down the railwaymen in the market place at Pilna. We have waited four years, and at last——"

"Now, then, that's enough." A very different voice, sharp, cool and official in tone, broke in upon the monologue. Instantly there was a horrified murmur among the crowd, which then resumed its noisy pushing and struggling. Tony, whose attention had been momentarily diverted from the platform, looked back at it, and saw to his amazement that an English police sergeant, rather dusty but quite unmistakable, had suddenly appeared in the middle of the stage, almost as if he were a pantomime figure. In another moment the mystery

of his arrival was solved by the appearance, through a trapdoor in the stage floor, of the head and shoulders, followed by the person, of a large fat constable. At a sign from his superior the last arrival waddled across the stage, pushing its bewildered occupants out of the way, and disappeared in the rear wings, while the sergeant advanced to the body and took hold of the arm of the weeping lady.

"Well, I'm damned!" Tony gasped. "Under the stage! What the hell did they think they were doing?"

"Holding a watching brief, I believe it's called, and taking some wholly valueless notes," said an amused voice beside him, and both young men turned to look at its owner, a tall dark man in the middle forties, at sight of whom Dick Warren gave a cry of recognition.

"Mr. Wilson! But—what on earth are you doing here?"

"Also holding a watching brief," Ex-Superintendent Wilson, once the chief pillar of Scotland Yard, and now the most famous private detective in England, replied. "But I don't do it under the floor. That's an idiosyncrasy of the Special Branch. I hope they got the shot down all right."

"They've probably put it down as two at least, with this echo," Tony observed. "It sounded quite like two."

"Did you," Dick Warren asked with awe in his voice, "did you know this was going to happen?"

"Oh, no. My business was nothing to do with

that. And as a matter of fact, I've finished it, such as it was. Your presence here, my dear Dick, and your friend's, will need more explaining."

"It's my own show," said Dick, not without pride; and proceeded to introduce his companion. "Will you come and have a drink with us, Mr. Wilson? The place appears to be clearing—unless they're arresting everybody outside."

"They're hardly likely to do that," Wilson said. "There are half a dozen exits, and I don't suppose there can have been more than three or four of them under the platform. Besides, I expect the orator next door will satisfy their blood lust." He glanced to where the bearded Moldavian was still keeping up his harangue. "I've rather a curiosity to see it through, though. Is the Minister dead, I wonder? Why doesn't that fool Tyrrell call for a doctor?"

At this moment, however, the sergeant, having detached the lady momentarily from the corpse, in a loud clear voice asked the theatre at large whether it could supply a doctor; and after an interval a frightened little fair man, with a face like a rabbit, turned back and came to the footlights. As two of the Executive helped him up there was an unmistakable noise of boots in the corridor outside the box, a door opened, and a gruff voice observed: "Now then, my man!"

"I'm going round," Wilson said suddenly, and moved towards the exit. One swift glance at each other and the two young men followed him.



## III

It is not, for the uninitiated, particularly easy to find one's way from the dress circle of a theatre to the back of the stage. But Wilson's expert training apparently included an extensive knowledge of the internal regions of the Minerva Hall, for in far less time than that taken by the constable his two followers found themselves leaping across a confused barricade of theatrical properties into the wings and so to the stage, where the group was standing almost as when they had last seen it, the police sergeant surveying with a kind of professional contempt the alarmed faces of the platform and the little doctor on his knees beside the body. In front of them the great smoky auditorium was already half empty, and the box whence the shot had come was empty too. Evidently the constable had made his arrest. The lady in the broad-brimmed hat had been moved to a distance of four or five feet from her friend, where she half knelt and half crouched, with her face buried in her hand, moaning softly to herself.

As the three entered the sergeant stepped forward briskly.

"Now, then," said he, "you're not wanted here. Nobody's wanted here. Oh"—seeing the card which Wilson held out to him—"I beg your pardon. I didn't know you, sir, at first." Not the least of Wilson's advantages as a private detective was the willingness of any and every member of the official police forces, knowing that it was some political hanky-panky that had caused his resignation from

their ranks, to extend their heartiest co-operation to him in all his cases. "I don't know these gentlemen, though."

"They were attending the meeting," Wilson said, and introduced the two. "I thought," he said with a smile, "you might want to question them."

The sergeant stared. "I've not much need to ask questions," he said. "Here's a dead body, and a shot, *and* a man who says he fired it. And every man jack on this platform can bear witness that he did it. I should think that'd satisfy most juries, Mr. Wilson."

"M. Grovno is dead, then?" Wilson inquired. The little doctor looked up from the floor.

"Yes, he's quite dead," he said in a shaking voice. "The bullet went into the brain. Look." He pointed to a round hole in the dead man's forehead. "He must have died at once. He's quite dead."

As he spoke there was a piercing scream from the lady on the floor. It was so loud that even the sergeant jumped.

"Dead!" she shrieked. "Oh, my God! Dead!" The accent in which she spoke might have been French, or might have come from somewhere farther to the East—at all events, it was not English. Half-springing to her feet, and pushing the little doctor aside with a gesture so imperious that he all but rolled over the footlights, she returned to the corpse, fell on her knees beside it and began caressing its hands, murmuring in broken half-sobbed phrases. Tony, who was no less impressed by her looks at close quarters than he had

been at a distance, went towards her with a vague thought of rendering assistance, but was headed off by the sergeant.

"I beg your pardon, madam," said he with a slight mitigation of his austerity, "but was the gentleman your husband?"

"He was my life!" sobbed the lady. "And I have killed him! I!" She broke into renewed cries. The sergeant pulled his moustache.

"Now, then, ma'am, don't take on like that. You haven't killed him. Here comes the man who did," he added, as the constable returned, leading the big Moldavian in handcuffs and carrying in a gingerly way the army pistol. "Gently, ma'am," as the lady gave another wail. "Let me deal with him. Well, you, what's your name?"

"Tomas Janik," the man replied.

"Well, Tomas Janik, I arrest you on charge of murdering Mussou Grovno. And it's my duty to warn you——"

"I beg your pardon, sergeant," Wilson interrupted, "but are you certain this gentleman is the murderer?"

"What!" The sergeant turned and stared at him absolutely dumbfounded. "Why, he says he is! And look at the pistol! It's still hot. Didn't you see him fire?"

"I shoot him," said Tomas Janik with satisfaction. "For betrayal."

"I *am* looking at the pistol," Wilson said, ignoring the last remark. "And that's exactly what makes me feel doubtful. Look at it yourself." He took

the heavy thing from the constable's hand and extracted a shell. "Now look at the wound." The sergeant and others crowded round to see. "I don't know how easily Dr. ———?" "Greenfield," said the man on the floor—"can get the bullet out. But I'll ask him now—and you too—if it's likely that that wound was made by a bullet of this calibre."

Even to the naked eye, the improbability was apparent. The big shell in Wilson's hand could scarcely have squeezed itself through the little hole in M. Grovno's forehead. And the doctor, on being appealed to, shook his head decisively.

"I can't get the bullet out here," he said. "I haven't the proper instruments. But I should say it came from a much smaller-sized weapon. Probably a small automatic."

"But what the—— What do you mean?" The sergeant stared around a ring of faces, none blanker than his own. "Where is the bullet, then? if it's not in his brain. Or do you mean this thing was charged with blank?"

"No, indeed! It is not blank!" the indignant assassin protested. "I tell you I shoot him. I charge with ball. I fire ball at him—to kill."

"Oh, I've no doubt you fired ball at him," Wilson said soothingly. "The magazine's fully charged, except for one shot. But I don't think you hit him."

"Do you mean he missed?" said the sergeant.

"Not quite. At least, I think not. Look." Wilson pointed to a fresh cut on the dead man's

left cheek-bone. "It looks to me as though the shot had just grazed him and passed on. He didn't cut himself in falling, for he fell on his back. And that's a fresh wound."

"Didn't kill him? Grazed his cheek? Then where is it—the bullet?" The sergeant stared at Wilson as though he had the shot in his pocket.

"Well, I should say it's somewhere around." Wilson pointed up at the box. "It was fired from there, and you can see where M. Grovno was standing. I don't think he deflected it much. So I should expect to find it in the floor; somewhere, I should say, between those two wings." There was a general rush of feet towards the spot he indicated.

"Stop that!" the sergeant shouted. "Nobody's to go over there. Barker," to the constable, "you go and see if you can find that bullet. But," he turned to Wilson in some perplexity, "the man was shot, wasn't he?"

"Oh, yes," said Wilson. "No doubt of that, poor fellow."

"Then—what shot him?"

"Ah!" said Wilson. "That's just what we don't know." There was a moment's silence, during which the sergeant stared with sudden interest at the lady kneeling by the body.

"Then it wasn't an echo!" Tony said suddenly. Even to himself, his voice sounded extraordinary in the hush, and the sergeant too seemed to feel it, for he turned fiercely on him.

"What do you mean?"

"I thought," Tony explained, "that there was an echo of the shot. This place is full of echoes; you can't hear half of what people are saying. But it must have been the second shot."

"The second one? Why not the first?"

"It wasn't half as loud," Tony explained. "This fellow fired first—if Mr. Wilson's right. And then came the second one—the one that killed him."

"This is very extraordinary." The sergeant spoke with annoyance as his clear case began to darken under his eyes. He turned and addressed the company. "Gentlemen, I'm afraid I shall have to ask you to submit to be searched—or to come with me to the police station." He blew on a small whistle, and in a few seconds two other constables, who had presumably been guarding other parts of the building, appeared. "Search these men."

The search was a long and slow business. Dick and Tony followed Wilson's example and presented themselves as lay figures to the constables, and Tony, at all events, was surprised to find how deft and inquiring thick police hands could be. But, thorough as the proceedings were, and unsuspected as were some of the objects retrieved from forgotten pockets, they threw no light on the matter in hand. There was nothing remotely resembling a pistol of any kind. And, just as the search was completed, Constable Barker re-emerged from the wings announcing that there was no trace of a bullet to be seen anywhere.

"I have examined every inch of the place, sir,"

he answered gravely, "and there is nothing whatever to be seen except this."

"This" was a large red paper rosette, which had apparently been trampled on, for it was crushed and dusty.

"That's no good to us," the sergeant said, tossing it carelessly on to the table. "That's only one of their stewards' badges." Wilson picked it up and stared at it reflectively.

"Well, of course it might have been a steward," was all he said.

"Oh, I'm not forgetting them," the sergeant said. "Trust me for that. But there's more than stewards been here to-day." He turned to the man who had taken the chair. "Mr. President, or whatever you call yourself, I'll have to trouble you for the names and addresses of all present on this platform."

"Certainly, sergeant."

"And for the names and addresses of all the stewards at the meeting."

The chairman looked at a little man standing behind him, who appeared to indicate that this also could be done.

"And of the rest of the meeting."

This request put the organisers in a flutter, and after some consultation with his colleagues the chairman explained that though they could get through the stewards the credentials of accredited delegates, they could not be certain that this covered the whole of those present. There would be reporters and individual members of the Party

and friends of members. "And police spies," the secretary remarked in an unpleasant voice.

"Now, then, none of that," the sergeant snapped. "It doesn't become any of you to talk of police spies with an undetected murderer among you. And let me tell you your whole Party's under suspicion till this affair's cleared up, so the sooner you can manage to get me a full list of those present the better. Now, gentlemen, if you'll give me your names and addresses you can go for the present; but remember I may be wanting you again, so I'll trouble you not to move from your present addresses without notifying Scotland Yard. Dr. Greenfield"—the little doctor jumped as if he had been shot—"will you stay till the police surgeon comes? The ladies, I'm afraid, must go to the station to be searched."

"Oh, no, no, no!" The lady whose life M. Grovno had been, and who had not moved again from her kneeling position beside his body, gave a moan of protest. "It is too horrible—horrible!"

The sergeant grunted and glanced at Wilson, but, strengthened perhaps by some expression in the latter's face, refused to make any concession. Eventually the lady was persuaded to depart, with her companions, in charge of one of the policemen.

"Can we get out this way?" Wilson asked another of them, pointing to the wing which he thought had contained the missing bullet. The third was sitting at the table writing down names and addresses.

"Yes, sir," the constable said. "There's a little



stair just round the corner that leads straight to the stage door. „ You can't miss it.” Wilson turned to his two satellites.

“ Shall we take it ? ” he said. They followed him eagerly, but had to wait while he carefully examined every conceivable spot where a bullet might have lodged. Apparently the search was vain, for with a murmured compliment to Constable Barker he passed on down the winding stone stair to the stage door, which was guarded by yet another blue-uniformed figure.

“ You can let us through, Gillespie,” Wilson said, and was greeted with a smile and a half-salute. “ We've left our names and addresses upstairs. Where's this street lead to ? ” He glanced up and down the narrow alley.

“ First right this way brings you to Pentonville Road,” the constable replied. “ Left's a cul-de-sac. Right the other end gets you to York Road in the end, but there's a lot of turns. Left don't go anywhere particular.”

“ Thanks. Not a taxi rank anywhere near, is there ? ”

“ No nearer'n King's Cross, sir.”

“ I say,” Tony put in shyly, “ my car's just round at the front of this place. She'll take you anywhere quicker than a taxi. Or—there's a decent pub about two hundred yards along. Unless you want to get on the trail at once ? ”

Wilson laughed. “ I daresay we could manage a drink first,” he said.

## IV

"I humbly beg your pardon, Dick," said Tony, when the three of them were safely seated in a corner of the taproom discussing whiskies, "for being rude to your conference. I'd no idea you kept pukka murderers on the premises."

"Rather strong meat, I should have said," Wilson chuckled. "Is this how you generally make converts?" But Dick took the matter seriously.

"No, indeed it isn't! You know that's all nonsense, sir. Our people aren't murderers!"

"They go about with army pistols, though," Tony said, "and loose them off at unoffending citizens. That seems to me to come precious near."

"He wasn't an unoffending citizen! If you were a Moldavian you wouldn't think so. And, anyway, Janik didn't run away. He said what he'd done, and stayed to be taken. That's quite different!"

"Killing no murder, eh?" Wilson laughed. "All right, Dick, I see your point. But, you know, there *was* a murderer there, all the same, in your conference. One who didn't confess and didn't stay to be taken. As you say, that's quite different, and I'm a little afraid it may be awkward for some of your friends if he doesn't turn up."

"By the way, sir," Tony asked, "why did you tip the sergeant the wink not to let Madame Grovno go?"

"Quick eyes," said Wilson, looking at him approvingly. "You'll make a detective yet, Mr. Redford. Well, in the first place, because she isn't Madame Grovno."

"Who is she, then?"

"A Parisian dancer—I think Hungarian by birth—whom our late friend picked up about a year ago at one of his international conferences. Of course you know, Dick, that whatever the public virtues of your distinguished delegate, his private life was, to say the least of it, a little irregular? Oh, well, I daresay your organisers didn't tell you; it doesn't do for political gatherings to be too particular. But it's not as *censor marum* that I suggested to Sergeant Tyrrell that he should keep his eye on the beautiful lady—though it's perhaps a little unusual for Grovno to display his mistresses in public. Still, she may have turned up out of curiosity, like our friend here. But I'd an odd feeling about her grief. It seemed excessive, somehow, judging from what I know of her career. And that melodramatic exclamation."

"Do you mean you think she meant it, sir? That she shot him?"

"No. That—possibly—she knows something which may emerge in a less crowded environment. No, I don't think it was a confession. Besides it's not possible. I had noticed—perhaps you had also—where she was sitting. She was almost directly behind him, and the shot struck him almost full in the forehead. It wasn't physically possible for her hand to have fired it, unless he'd turned his back to his audience, and practised speakers don't do that."

"Of course." Tony looked at the detective with admiration. "I'd not thought of the direction of the shot. Of course, that makes all the difference.

That means it came from the audience—I say, sir! What about that doctor? Do you think it could have been him? I mean, he seemed awfully rattled, and very unwilling to come up, didn't he?"

"Eh?" After several seconds, Wilson's mind seemed to return from some distant depths of reflection. "I beg your pardon. Greenfield? Oh, no, not a bit likely. I know all about Greenfield. He's just beginning to make a name in his profession, and he doesn't want to be mixed up in a shady criminal case. Very natural, too. He was hoping to get away quietly."

"Then do you know anyone——?"

"I can't say at the moment," said Wilson, rising to his feet. "And I'm very sorry, but I must leave you to finish your drinks alone. I've just remembered something that I ought to have looked into earlier. Apologies." And, throwing half-a-crown on the table, he was gone, almost before they realised he was going.

"Impetuous sort of fellow, isn't he?" Tony remarked. "Do you suppose he's just off to arrest the murderer, what?"

"Shouldn't wonder," Dick replied. "He's like that. He'll sit like a mummy for hours, and then rush off like a retriever after a partridge."

"Must be a jolly life," said Tony enviously. "I wish to God I could do it. But I suppose you have to keep your eyes so frightfully wide open, and I'm always half asleep. Look at the way he'd got that point about the direction of the shot now. By Jove!" He suddenly took a pencil from his

pocket and began drawing cabalistic lines on the table-top.

"What's the great idea?" his friend asked with idle curiosity.

"Nothing. Or—I don't know . . . it might be something. Look here, Dick, don't your chaps hang out scouts or something when they have conferences? Or do they just let anybody walk in anyhow?"

"Of course they don't," Dick said indignantly. "It's the stewards' job to look at everyone's credentials. I showed mine, and I went bail for you. But the stewards aren't supposed to search people to see if they're carrying anything they shouldn't. We'd never get the business started if they were."

"Of course not. Keep your wool on. I'm not accusing anybody. But your stewards—where d'you put 'em? At the entrances, and so on?"

"Yes, and in the gangways, to see people get in and move up, you know."

"This stage door we came out of just now—would there have been a steward there?"

"I suppose so."

"Could you find out who he was—I mean, would your jolly old secretary know?"

"I don't know. The Conference Arrangements Committee sees to all that. I suppose *their* secretary'd know, whoever he is."

"Look here, Dick—could you possibly find out—quietly—who the fellow at the stage-door was?"

"Why on earth?"

"Because," said Tony with barely-suppressed excitement, "because I believe he let the murderer in, and certainly out."

"But what the devil . . . ? I thought you said just now the man was in front. In the stalls."

"I was wrong, that's all. See here," Tony pointed to his diagram, "I just remembered noticing that when the old josses'd finished his first peroration and was waiting for you lads to cheer him, he turned his head and stared right into the wings. I remember thinking at the time what a first-class silhouette he'd make. And then the shot came—before he'd time to turn back. So, don't you see, as it hit him full in the forehead, the chap who fired it must have been standing somewhere in the wings—couldn't have been in front, or he'd have hit him on the side of the head. And, by Jove," he added, as another recollection struck him, "that's how the other fellow's bullet came to glance along his cheek. Of course, if he'd been facing the audience, it would have got him on the nose. Look, there's the box with your Bolshie friend in it, and there's the old boy, and there are the wings. I can't draw for nuts, but you can see what I mean."

"Well, of course, if the murderer was there, the obvious way for him to get out was the way we did—down the curly stairs and out through the stage door. And if he did that, he must have passed your man somewhere there—if you'd a man there. So we could find *him*, don't you see; he might know who the murderer was, or what he looked like, or where he went, anyway."

"I'm not sure," said Dick, surveying the design, "that I want to know who he is."

"Why on earth—Oh, I see. You're afraid he might be one of your pals, and you might have to give him away. But look here, old son, if he is, isn't it better that you and I should know it than the coppers? I mean—we ain't responsible for the public welfare and all that; and if we think he oughtn't to be caught, we could just give him the tip to do a bunk? But I don't somehow see old Tyrrell giving a fellow a friendly warning, do you? Besides . . . oh, hang it, how can you see a thing like this and not *want* to follow it up—specially when it's your show that's under suspicion?"

The former of the last two arguments was clearly the one which weighed with the speaker, who had been considerably uplifted by Wilson's praise of his powers of observation; but it was the latter which, urged with all his friend's eloquence, finally induced the reluctant Dick to undertake a journey to the headquarters of the Party in order to find out if possible, the name of the steward who had been on duty at the stage door that afternoon. Arrived at the office, which he firmly refused to let Tony enter, he found it, as was only to be expected, in a terrible state of alarm and fluster, and in the confusion had some little difficulty in securing the information he required. However, he at last rejoined his impatient partner, armed with a name and address.

"'J. D. Evans, 53 Carshalton St., Clapton,'" Tony read. "Where on earth is Clapton?"

"Out beyond Hackney."

"God! what places your people live in! Think I've got enough juice?"

It was, however, a mistake to take Tony's car. Carshalton Street, Clapton, where Mr. J. D. Evans was being lodged during the conference week-end, may have seen cars passing through it before; it was certainly not used to seeing them stop in it. The inhabitants of the street immediately reached the conclusion that the two friends belonged to either the medical or the police service, and began inquiring in unnecessarily loud voices as to the whereabouts of the baby and the handcuffs. They reached No. 53 finally in a blaze of publicity.

"Damn!" said Tony. "Couldn't have advertised ourselves better if we were the whole C.I.D."

Such, indeed, appeared to be the view of Mr. J. D. Evans, when at last they met him. He was a hollow-checked, dark-eyed little Welshman, whose face and clothes, to Dick's more practised eye, spelt unemployment and long-continued unemployment; and he obviously did not want to talk to them at all. He admitted, after much pressing, that he had been the steward on duty at the stage door, but with sulky asperity refused any other information. He didn't know who'd come in that way, or how many, or how long he'd been there, or when he went on duty or when he went off, or what time the row started, or anything. That is to say, as the perplexed Tony felt, he *must* know some of these things, or he would never have been entrusted with his post; but he quite clearly did not want to tell them. But why? Why be so uncommunicative to a fellow



member of his own organisation? As Dick, who certainly did not lack persistence when once he had taken a matter up, was stolidly continuing to put questions, Tony surveyed Mr. Evans from head to toe, noticing his patched and shabby clothes, and still more the nervous movements of his thin hands, and the way his hungry dark eyes searched Dick's face.

"What's it got to do with you, anyway, comrade?" he cried at last, in a tone so feebly fierce as almost to suggest physical violence.

Dick was proceeding in a somewhat laborious manner to explain, when he felt his sleeve jerked furiously, and saw that Tony, with a face anxiously pale, was pulling him away.

"Nothing whatever," said Tony sharply. "Dick, come out of this. It's none of our business, and we're wasting time. Sorry to have troubled you, Mr. Evans. Oh, Dick, for God's sake come!" And he dragged his friend down the street and into the waiting car almost before Dick's slower wits had grasped what was happening.

"Well!" said the latter, as they swung recklessly into the Hackney Road. "Perhaps you'll condescend to tell me what you're up to, and where we're going? Why on earth did you drag me away like that, just when I thought I was going to find out something?"

"Yes, but find out what?" Tony said. "Oh, God, I wish I knew . . . I wish I'd never gone there . . . Dick, I say, is that fellow a pal of yours?"

"Oh, a bit. I mean, I've seen him half a dozen times. I don't know him really well."

"Is he—a decent sort of a lad?"

"Oh, first-rate," said Dick heartily, "though a bit grumpy at times, as you saw. He's got plenty of excuse, though, poor chap. He's a miner from South Wales; his wife died during the lock-out and left him with a family of kids, and he's been out of work ever since. I don't know how he manages to live, but he does, and works like a nigger for the Party, too. You needn't have worried, he wasn't going to go for me, though I admit he looked like it."

"I wasn't worrying about you, you idiot!"

"Then what's eating you?"

"I tell you I don't know. Where's Mr. Wilson live?"

"I haven't an idea. His office is in Charing Cross, but of course it'll be closed now."

"What number?"

"Look here, what in the hell's the use? I tell you it'll be closed."

"I'm going all the same. There's just a chance he may be there. I *must* see him if I can."

And so he did, in spite of the other's protests; and when Wilson's offices in Charing Cross had proved as blank and unresponsive as might have been expected at eight o'clock of a Sunday evening, he was with difficulty persuaded to refrain from ringing up all the Wilsons in the London telephone directory on the chance that one of them might be the man he wanted, before he finally agreed to let his exhausted friend find somewhere to eat. After a gloomy and silent dinner, during which Tony firmly refused to say what was in his mind, they parted for the night.

## V

The thought which had driven Tony post-haste out of the Clapton house, and which continued to trouble him to the extent of depriving him of several hours' sleep, was simply the recollection of a red rosette last seen in Wilson's hand, and previously retrieved from the floor of the stage, just near by where he had believed the murderer to be standing. That red rosette, Tony knew, was the steward's badge, and had presumably come there off a steward's coat. And it was this fact, coupled with the nervous and suspicious taciturnity of the man who had admittedly been doing steward's duty on the spot, which had sent him flying before a breath of his thought should enter Dick's mind. For Dick was an earnest and persistent creature, and if the same idea had occurred to him, he would not have run away, as Tony had ; he would have remained and probed it to the bottom. And then what would have happened ? For it was one thing to investigate what strangers had got into the afternoon's meeting and how ; it was quite another to fix a crime on one of your own friends, and a " first-rate fellow " at that. It will be observed that Tony had unconsciously quite accepted Dick's statement that no member of his Party would have shot a man and run away, but now he was not quite so sure. The man Evans, he rehearsed to himself, was certainly frightened as well as grumpy. He was very badly off, out-of-work, and victimised. Could he, for cash down, say, have done a thing like

that ? Then—" I'm damned if I set the coppers on him if he has, poor devil," thought Tony ; but again " It's murder if he did. Real murder. And he might do it again. What on earth ought I to do ? Well, anyway, I can ask Mr. Wilson before I do anything." And on this reflection he at last fell asleep.

The problem woke him next morning at an unusually early hour ; and after a hastily swallowed breakfast he dashed down once more to Charing Cross, where he found, to his disgust though not wholly to his surprise, that Wilson had not yet arrived. A clerk, whose impassive face seemed to him to show a criminal lack of interest in his business, showed him into a small waiting-room, which he found he was to share with an unmistakable taxi driver ; and there ensued some twenty minutes of waiting, which Tony supported considerably less well than did the taxi driver. At last, however, there was the welcome sound of feet on the stairs. But, confound it ! there were almost certainly more than one pair. And there were undeniably voices. Had Wilson the bad taste to bring in yet another client with him ? But no . . . in a minute the door of the waiting-room opened, and the clerk looked in and beckoned silently to—the taxi driver ! Tony's class-conscious spirit nearly sent him furiously down the stairs again, but fortunately he restrained the impulse, for in another minute the door opened again and Wilson himself appeared.

" You wanted to see me, Mr. Redford ? " he said, and Tony, without any further preliminary, hastily blurted out all his deductions and all his fears.

"So I don't know what to do," he concluded miserably, his eyes on Wilson's face.

"I see," the latter said. "Well, Mr. Redford, let me first compliment you on your observation. You reached exactly the same conclusion as to the direction of the shot that I did myself. But as to the rest, I think you're wrong." Tony gave a gasp of relief. "You thought that Mr. Evans might be the guilty person on the evidence of this?" He took the tell-tale rosette from his pocket. "That he dropped it in his haste?" Tony nodded without speaking.

"Well, I don't think he did—chiefly because the thing's a fake. I had a good look at the steward who passed me in, and found that he was wearing a rosette made of red ribbon. Later I confirmed that all the stewards' rosettes were similarly made. They were served out by the committee at the beginning of the conference. But this thing, as you can see, isn't made of ribbon at all; it's made of red paper. It's a good enough imitation to pass in that dim light, but it's an imitation for all that. So I think we may exonerate your friend at the door. This rosette was manufactured by somebody who for some reason wished to pass as a steward—and I think we can guess why."

"But——" Tony stammered. "Do you mean—Evans had nothing to do with it? I'd like to think so, but he looked awfully queer. Really as if *he had* done something, I mean."

"I think he had," said Wilson. "I also think I've got an idea what it was. But shall we leave

that for a moment and see how my friend Inspector Blaikie's getting on with the taxi driver? He's part of your case, too."

He led the way into his own office, where an undoubted policeman in plain clothes was talking to the taxi driver, notebook in hand.

"This," said Wilson, as the policeman looked up, "is Mr. Redford, who has been collecting some very interesting information about this business. Mr. Redford, Inspector Blaikie. Well, Blaikie, any luck?"

"You're right, as usual," the inspector said. "Though how you guessed it was a taxi beats me."

"Well, he would almost have had to have a taxi," Wilson said. "Unless he lived very near. Where did you pick up this man you think is ours?" he asked the taxi driver.

"Pentonville Road," the man replied. "'Bout two hundred yards from King's Cross. Pretty well all in he was, too, when he hailed me."

"And you put him down—where?"

"Middlesex 'Ospital."

Wilson made a gesture of impatience. "I might have saved twelve hours if I'd thought of trying the hospitals. But I made sure he'd go home."

"So he did, guvnor," said the cabbly with a grin. "Leastways he tried. 'Twasn't he told me to go the Middlesex. No, says he, put me down in Regent Street, corner of Mortimer Street. But when I gets there, see, he's all fallen in a 'cap like. And I looks in the cab and sees blood all over his clothes and on the cushions. So I thinks, Lord knows what's

happened to you, me lad, but I'm best out of it whatever it is. " So I takes him to the Middlesex, and there you are."

" And there he is, I hope," said Blaikie.

" And if you're from Scotland Yard, sir," the cabman added, " I might mention there's two and six owing from Pentonville Road *and* the damage to the cushions."

" You'll be all right. I'll see to that," said Blaikie. To Wilson he added: " I suppose he'll be there still."

" If he isn't it's my fault," Wilson said, " for not taking the elementary precaution of ringing up the hospitals last night. I hope and believe they won't have let him out so soon. But it's not the man I'm anxious about. We'd best get along there quickly. I'll make Jevons call a taxi."

" Excuse me," Tony put in at this point, " but my car's at the door. I can run you up in half the time a taxi would take."

" Will your car hold four ? " Wilson asked. " We want Mr. Rogers with us for identification purposes."

" Easily," Tony said, " If you don't mind a bit of a squash."

It was more than a bit, for neither the cabman nor the inspector was a thin man ; but eventually they got on their way, Blaikie sitting in front with the driver. " Tell him about Madame Grovno, Blaikie," Wilson called from behind. " He deserves to know."

" The superintendent," Blaikie began obediently as they shot into Cockspur Street—and then pulled

himself up suddenly. "Mr. Wilson, I mean, was right as usual in telling Tyrrell to keep his eye on the lady. Tyrrell, of course, didn't know—the Special Branch don't know that sort of thing—that there'd been a first-class row when Grovno picked her up, and that the man who'd had her last, a Hungarian called Kolyi, and her dancing partner, had sworn to be revenged. This was about a year back, but Grovno hadn't stirred from Moldavia since, until a month ago, and Kolyi didn't dare go there. He was in Paris mostly, by the way. Then Grovno started on his international tour. There was an attempt on his life reported somewhere near Budapest—no names; it might have been anyone. Then we were privately informed that Kolyi was coming to England. Mr. Wilson didn't know this, by the way, so it's all the more credit to him to have tumbled to it the way he did. Well, we were looking out for Kolyi, but he gave us the slip, and we didn't know what had become of him. We offered Grovno police protection, but he wouldn't take it. Then comes this affair; Mr. Wilson thinks of Kolyi at once, traces him through that taxi driver, as you've heard. And now we're going to the Middlesex to see if it's the same man."

"Then *that's* what the woman meant by saying she'd killed him!" Tony cried. "Why—she was sitting behind . . . she may even have seen this Kolyi! But—why should he be in the Middlesex?"

"That, if I may say so," Blaikie chuckled, "was the cutest idea of all. But you'll see for yourself, Mr. Redford. Here we are."



They tumbled out at the door of the Middlesex Hospital. The chief surgeon was awaiting them, and Wilson looked an inquiry at him.

"Oh, yes," the surgeon said. "We've got him safe for you—and would have kept him a day or two longer. It was a nasty wound, in the shoulder, though not dangerous. But he's lost a fair amount of blood. He's only half conscious, now, if you want to have a look at him."

"Did you happen to see the bullet?"

"I did. Good hefty charge from an army pistol. As a matter of fact, I kept it, just in case of accidents. You see, it was an odd business altogether, a man turning up out of nowhere with an army bullet in him, and I thought somebody might be asking questions about it."

"Good man!" said Wilson softly. "Well, shall we go?"

The surgeon led the way into a long ward, where a man, olive-skinned and dark-haired, lay bandaged in a bed with his eyes closed, tossing and muttering to himself.

"That's Kolyi, beyond a doubt," Wilson said. "Is it also your passenger, Mr. Rogers?"

"That's 'im," the cabman said. "I'll take my oath on it. Foreign-looking gent, I said he was. That's how I 'appened to notice him."

"Well, that's that, then," said Wilson. "Thanks very much, Dr. Morton. The inspector will be sending a man down to keep an eye on your patient, and I think he'd appreciate the loan of that bullet you took out of him."

## VI

"It was really a problem in geometry," said Wilson, as he sat in a Soho restaurant with Dick and Tony, eating a meal which the latter had insisted on ordering to celebrate the occasion. "As Mr. Redford very acutely observed, given the angle of the wound and the position of Grovno, the shot could only have come from that distant wing. There, presumably, the murderer had stood, and there also was the false rosette that had served to disguise his presence. But there was also the other bullet, which had totally disappeared without leaving a trace, and in that very same wing. I worked out the angles, and it seemed to me that the only place the bullet could have gone was somewhere in the murderer's body about shoulder level. Well, it didn't kill him, or we should have found his body; but it must have damaged him considerably. You can't carry a large army bullet inside you without being inconvenienced. I therefore guessed that he wouldn't have been able to walk far, and would have had to take a taxi unless he lived very close. I'd an idea then, arising partly from Madame Grovno's behaviour, of who he might be, and then I went to see Blaikie and found that her late lover was actually supposed to be in London. So then we made inquiries of the taxis from nearby ranks and found Mr. Rogers without much difficulty. Of course I ought to have made inquiries of the hospitals at once; but being impressed by the idea that he'd have tried to get away

as quickly as he could, I overlooked the possibility of his having fainted."

"Retributive justice, by Jove," said Tony. "But, I say, sir, didn't Evans do anything at all? Could I have saved all my hash?"

"Evans," said Wilson, "whom I saw this afternoon, committed a crime in his own eyes, but not quite the crime of which you suspected him. He left his post for a short while during the afternoon to do something with a friend—I didn't inquire what—and it was during his absence that Kolyi got in. He wasn't in fear of the police, but of his own officers. I understand," he said to Dick, "that your people's discipline is pretty strict, and he was afraid of losing his conference allowance, which, as you know, he couldn't afford to do."

"I say, poor devil!" said Tony repentantly. "And there was I thinking he'd committed murder at least. I am a rotten fool."

"Not at all," Wilson said. "I think you did excellently. The reading of motives is a thing which only comes with practice."

"But how the devil is one to practise?" Tony sighed; and then looked up with a shy hope. "I say, Mr. Wilson, if ever you want an apprentice, you'll remember me, won't you?"

## THE DISAPPEARANCE OF PHILIP MANSFIELD

JEVONS entered Wilson's sanctum and closed the door softly behind him.

"A lady to see you, sir," he said. "She won't give her name."

Wilson groaned. Of all his clients, he hated most distressed ladies who refused to give their names.

"What sort of a lady?" he asked.

"Well dressed, sir, about thirty, very quiet and pleasant looking; quite a lady, sir," said Jevons, who had been trained to tell his employer what he wanted to know in as few words as possible. "She is very much upset," he added.

Wilson thrust from him the papers—a dull case—at which he was working. "Send her in," he said, "but tell her I'm very busy." He rose from his chair.

A moment later he was shaking hands with a tall, good-looking woman, well but soberly dressed, whose face he faintly remembered, but whom he could not name or place in his memory.

"I have met you before," he said, "Mrs. ——?" His eye had noticed the wedding ring and keeper bulging through the glove.

"Mansfield," said the lady. "You saw me just for a moment when I came here to call for my husband last week."

"Of course," said Wilson, "Your husband was to have come to see me this morning. I hope there is nothing——"

"Oh, Mr. Wilson," said the lady, "my husband has disappeared. I am sure there is something wrong." He could see the excitement and distress his visitor was holding back.

"Disappeared!" said Wilson. "Sit down here and tell me all about it."

"You know nothing?"

"My dear lady, I can hardly believe what you tell me."

"Oh, I hoped against hope you might know. My husband consulted you last week." Mrs. Mansfield paused. "He did not tell me what it was about."

"It was about a business trouble, madam, but I cannot see at present how it can have any connection with his disappearance. Suppose you tell me what has happened in your own way. Take your time, and omit nothing that can possibly be of importance, even if you do not see its connection with this affair."

While the visitor told her tale, Wilson sat at his table, with eyes closed and the tips of his long, slender fingers pressed tightly together. His legs were thrust out before him. Save by putting an occasional question, he gave no sign of the impression which the narrative made on him.

"It happened only last night," said Mrs. Mansfield. "My husband came home just as usual, but I could tell that something was worrying him."

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He kept humming a tune softly under his breath, as he does when he is upset. We had dinner quietly together, and he was quite his normal self, except perhaps that he talked rather less than usual. We had finished dinner when a note was brought in by the parlour-maid. It was from Tom Pointer, who is Phil's greatest friend in Hampstead. You have probably heard of him."

"The theatrical manager?" asked Wilson. The paunchy figure of the great producer of popular musical comedies came at once into his mind's eye.

Mrs. Mansfield nodded. "Yes, he is a great friend of my husband's. This note from him was to ask Phil to go down and join a men's bridge four at his house. The house is only a few minutes away, the other side of the Spaniards' Way, and, as it was a fine night, Phil went off just as he was, without even a hat or coat. He told me not to sit up for him, as he might be late. So, at about eleven, I went to bed, and it wasn't till I woke up this morning that I found he hadn't come back. I got up at once and went to the telephone and rang up Mr. Pointer. He was apparently still in bed, but they fetched him to the telephone. I asked what had happened to Phil. He seemed very surprised and asked what was wrong. I asked whether Phil wasn't still in his house, or when he had left. Tom seemed puzzled, and it came out that Phil had never been there at all. And, Mr. Wilson, Tom absolutely denied that he had written any letter to Phil last night, and said he had been out all the evening. I dressed quickly and went round to see him. And

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that's what he tells me. Phil never went to his house, and he didn't write any note inviting him."

"Have you the note that your husband received?"

"No. Phil took it away in his pocket."

"Did you see it? Was it Mr. Pointer's writing?"

"It looked just like his, but I suppose it can't have been. Oh, Mr. Wilson, whoever can have lured my husband away?"

"My dear lady, there are half a hundred possible explanations, but I can't tell yet which is the right one. What did you do when you had seen Mr. Pointer?"

"I went to the police station and told them all about it. Then I remembered that my husband had consulted you, and came here at once to see if you knew anything about it."

"Did you tell Mr. Pointer where you were going?"

"About the police, yes. He advised me to go to the station. In fact, he offered to go with me, but he wasn't properly dressed, and I wanted to go at once. I've just come on to you from the police station now."

Wilson asked what the police inspector had said about the case. He had, Mrs. Mansfield said, asked her a great many questions and promised to make full inquiries into the case. But—she hesitated—he had seemed rather as if he supposed her husband's disappearance would clear itself up in due course.

"I believe," she said, "he thought Phil had gone away of his own free will."

Wilson made no reply to this. It was, indeed, quite a possible explanation. Instead, he asked her

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whether Tom Pointer had told her where he had been the night before when, as he said, he had been out the whole evening. Yes, Pointer had said that he had dined at Verney's, and then gone on to the first night of a new film, *The Dearth of a Notion*, at the Loggia.

"Was he alone?"

"Oh, Mr. Wilson, you can't suspect Tom Pointer of having anything to do with this. He's Phil's greatest friend."

Wilson could quite well imagine circumstances in which a husband's greatest friend might help him to disappear quietly from his wife. But he did not tell Mrs. Mansfield this; nor did the explanation seem, on the face of it, to cover the facts as he knew them.

"My dear lady, I suspect no one," he said. "Equally I suspect everybody. It is far too early to begin making up one's mind."

"Well," said Mrs. Mansfield decisively, "I'm certain Tom Pointer hadn't anything to do with it. And he wasn't alone. He told me that his brother, Mr. Adolphus Pointer, was with him."

"That, I suppose, is the Adolphus Pointer who is your husband's producer?"

"Yes."

"What time did your husband leave home?"

"About nine o'clock. It would only take him three minutes to get to Tom's house."

"I see. Will you give me both addresses?"

"Our house is The Haven, Heathwood Road. The Pointers live at Lawnwood, a house standing in



its own grounds right at the edge of the Heath, near North End Road."

"How," Wilson asked finally, "was your husband dressed when he left?"

In his ordinary office suit of gray tweeds, it appeared, the only distinctive thing about his attire being a diamond scarf pin which he always wore. And nothing that the lady could tell him gave Wilson any further light. Mrs. Mansfield apparently did not know what had been troubling her husband, though she thought he had been worried more than once of late. She knew nothing either of monetary troubles or of personal cares that could have seriously upset him. She made it clear that to the best of her belief she and Phil, who had been married only two years, were wrapped up in each other, and in their only child, now aged just under a year. Wilson sent her back to her boy, cheering her with the hope that there was really nothing wrong, and that her husband might return at any moment. But he had serious doubts. When she had gone, he sat down again to think the case out quietly for himself. Had it any connection with the matter of which Mansfield had consulted him a fortnight before? It might have, or it might not. Philip Mansfield, a very clever actor who somehow never got the "star" parts and was always praised for the perfect finish with which he played the secondary characters, had married, two years before, a lady with a considerable fortune. With his wife's money he had embarked on management, playing the leading rôle in several plays which the public

shunned, though both the plays and the acting were enthusiastically praised by the critics. Mansfield had lost money over the ventures, and he had lost more than the comparative failure of the plays was enough to account for. He had gone into the position and had discovered that he was being systematically cheated. He had called in an accountant, with whose aid he had narrowed down the suspicion of guilt to two men, his manager and his producer, either or both of whom might be implicated. The manager's name was Foster; the producer was Adolphus Pointer, brother of the Tom Pointer whom he had set out to visit the night before.

Before taking steps against either of the two, or saying anything of his suspicions, Mansfield had come to Wilson and asked him to take the case in hand. Wilson had been actually reading, when Mrs. Mansfield was announced, the report of one of his subordinates proving that both Foster and Adolphus Pointer were heavily implicated in the frauds. But, even if either or both had gained an inkling of Mansfield's suspicions, it seemed rather drastic to go to the length of murdering or kidnapping him, besides being in all probability useless. And it was even less likely that a man of Tom Pointer's standing and reputation should be connected with anything of the sort. Wilson was perplexed but he saw his next steps clearly enough.

He first lunched at Verney's, and established the fact that both Tom and Adolphus Pointer had been there together from 7 to 8.30 on the previous

evening. Proceeding to the Loggia Theatre, he found from the attendant that Tom Pointer and another man, who was probably but not certainly his brother, had booked and entered there at twenty to nine, about ten minutes before the big film began. It was a little unfortunate perhaps that, as they had chosen a movie and not a theatre, Wilson was unable to find anyone who had actually seen them either sitting inside or departing. But, unless they had been deliberately faking an alibi, they were hardly likely to leave at least until the big picture had ended.

Wilson took no further steps until darkness had fallen, when he went up to the crest of Hampstead Heath and took a look at the house where the two Pointer brothers lived together. It was quite a small house in itself, standing just off the Golders Green side of the Spaniards' Way, just beyond the Golders Green turning. It abutted, however, on the grounds of a much larger and older house, from which the smaller property had probably at some time been cut off. Before investigating further, Wilson crossed the road and traversed the two or three hundred yards which divided him from Heathwood Road. Almost at its top, looking down on the Vale of Health, stood the Mansfields' house. Could a man be kidnapped between the two at nine o'clock of a spring evening? It was just possible, Wilson decided, but so unlikely that every other possibility ought to be tried first. Accordingly, he returned to Lawnwood, and, having slipped close to the house in the shadow of some

bushes and waited till all lights were safely out, he set about effecting an entrance. This gave him singularly little difficulty, the mere forcing of a conservatory door with a piece of bent wire sufficing to let him in. Moving very softly, and using an electric torch with extreme care, he searched the whole of the ground-floor, looking for some trace either of Mansfield's presence the night before or the complicity of either brother in his disappearance, but finding nothing. He was just about to abandon the search when his torch lit up something gleaming in the folds of one of a pair of curtains which could be drawn so as to separate the entrance hall from the lounge hall at the back of the house. On examination, he found that the gleam came from a diamond scarf pin in the curtain.

For a second or two he remained gazing at it. From Mrs. Mansfield's description he was pretty certain that it was Mansfield's pin, and that, therefore, Mansfield had been in the house the preceding evening. But, if so, where was he now? His thoughts had got so far when they were interrupted by the sound of a door opening above. With great rapidity he moved the curtain folds so as to hide the pin, and retreated to the garden by the way he had entered. There he remained, concealed in the bushes, while two or three men appeared and set about a search of the ground-floor premises. They even opened the conservatory door and stood for a moment looking into the garden and talking in low tones, but to Wilson's great relief they returned to the house without searching further. Possibly,

however, they had gone to ring up the police, in which case he would have to be quick. He did not want to meet the police at this stage.

He considered carefully. Presuming that Mansfield had been lured to the house either by the brothers or by someone using their name, he thought it exceedingly unlikely that he was still here. Lawnwood was so obviously the first place to be searched on his disappearance. But then, where was he? First, he might have been killed, or merely be held in captivity. Then, dead or alive, he might have either been hidden in the vicinity or taken away, probably by car, to some distance. For traces either of burial or transport by road one would have to search by daylight; there remained the possibility of a live man's being concealed somewhere near by.

At once Wilson's mind leapt to the big silent bulk of North House next door. He knew about North House, from which the Lawnwood grounds appeared to have been cut off. Named from the Lord North who was supposed to have stayed there in the eighteenth century, looking down from its windows on Chatham in his retirement at Pitt House below, it had been owned by Sir Ernest Percy-Hotham, the ambassador at Prague, but since his death had been untenanted, unless by caretakers. If empty now, it would provide a splendid temporary repository for unwanted actor-managers.

Wilson moved to the boundary wall which separated the grounds of the two houses and began

searching. For some time he got no result, the path which ran alongside the wall being too hard to show traces. After a little while, however, he came to a spot where his torch showed him that the ivy which covered the coping had been dragged down and torn. He moved a little farther along and climbed the wall. On the far side were the remnants of a flower bed, scarred with freshly-made footprints, of which some, certainly, were unusually deep. Some people, at all events, had crossed the wall at that point within the last day or so, and one at least of that number had been carrying a heavy weight.

Very softly Wilson made his way to the dark, silent bulk of North House. At the farther end a couple of lighted windows suggested caretakers still about. Wilson waited until the light disappeared, and then set about his second burglary of the evening. It was not nearly so easy as the first, but at length, having climbed on the flat roof of a projecting billiard room, he succeeded in forcing a window. Knowing how hard it is to move soundlessly on bare boards, he muffled his feet with wraps he had brought with him and began creeping through the long rooms. Nothing but shuttered emptiness greeted him, till at length he reached a green baize door which looked as if it gave on to caretakers' premises. These, he thought, were best observed from the outside, and accordingly he descended to the ground floor, pausing by an unshuttered window and wondering whether he should get out that way.

As he stood, he was amazed to see a light, obviously from the house, shine suddenly on to the grass, while at the same time the faint sounds of feet and voices were audible through the window. It appeared that the source of both light and sounds was round the angle of the house, and so great was his desire to learn what was going on that he took the risk of opening the window—fortunately it opened quietly—and slipping out. Glueing himself to the wall, he crept along till he could see a man standing in a lighted square of lawn and looking up at the house.

"Come down," said the man in what sounded like an exasperated whisper.

A minute later a door was unbarred.

"What's up?" said an educated voice, which certainly belonged to no ordinary caretaker.

"Dolly's got the wind up," said the first man. "Someone's broken into Lawnwood, and nothing's been taken. Dolly thinks it's the police searching on the quiet, so I've pretended to go off and tell the station, and you're to get *him* away at once in the car and drop him somewhere well out in the country. It won't matter if he's found to-morrow. Drive out, anywhere, about fifty miles, and dump him where you won't be noticed, see?"

"I don't think," said the voice. "Why can't Dolly do his own dirty work? Catch me driving fifty miles with that in the car. Not me!"

"Oh, if you prefer to have the police find you here with him, I've no more to say."

"I tell you, Foster," the man grumbled, "I don't

like it. I've half a mind to clear out and leave him."

"Don't be a fool," said Foster. "What's the use of leaving a job half done?"

"Damn it all, can't you come too?" said the other. "It isn't a one-man job."

"Can't," said Foster. "He knows me. Is he safe now?"

"Quite. Tied him up myself."

"He doesn't know where he is?"

"Not on your life. I told him he's in Yorkshire." He sang to a popular tune, with a remarkably good voice, "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise."

"Shut up, man," said Foster hurriedly.

"Lead on, Macduff," said the other.

"Well, give him another of his pills. We don't want him singing out in the car. Then I'll help you carry him down. Be quick, man."

Wilson heard the first man retire into the house, while Foster waited for him on the lawn. Soon a voice called from the window.

"All serene," it said. "Come and help me down with him."

Wilson remained crouching against the wall, until he heard the sound of heavy footsteps coming downstairs and out of the door. Then he crept to the corner and, peeping round, saw two men, carrying a stretcher, cross the lawn in the direction of the drive. He followed as close as he dared. After a little while Foster stopped.

"Don't think we'll risk carrying him out to the



road," he said. "I'll bring the car up." He lowered his end of the stretcher.

"Well, buck up," said the other. "I'm getting fed up with this game."

Foster went off among the trees, leaving the other man pacing uneasily to and fro by the stretcher. In half a minute Wilson, with revolver cocked, stepped out of his bush.

"Hullo!" the other gasped. "What's this?"

"S-s-sh!" said Wilson, allowing the muzzle of his gun to show for a second. "Don't make a sound, if you value your life." Keeping the man covered, he stepped up to the stretcher, and saw Philip Mansfield's white, unconscious face lying in it.

"What in hell's this?" the captor muttered. "Are you the cops?"

"Never you mind," Wilson said. "The point for you to take in is that the game's up. I know all about this hanky-panky, and I'm taking Mansfield back with me now. And if you value your skin you're going to help me." The man was staring at him in goggle-eyed surprise. "What you have to do is this. When Foster comes back you're not to say a word about this to him, but get Mansfield and yourself into the car. *But* you're to make some excuse for getting Foster's back turned while I get in as well. Then you'll drive where I tell you. I'm a good shot, by the way, and I shall be covering you. But if you do what I tell you, there's a chance of your own part in this affair getting looked at lightly." The man said nothing. "Quick," said Wilson. "Make up your mind."

"If you are a cop——" said the man. "Will you swear it's O.K.?"

"Of course," said Wilson in slight perplexity.

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, very well. You've got 'em on me, comrade." There was a note almost of relief in his voice, Wilson thought, as he himself retreated rapidly to his bush. The car came up, and Foster helped his companion lift the stretcher into it.

"You know your job now," he said. "He's not to turn up before to-morrow evening. Drive him well out and leave him. If you like to give him a tap on the head before you say good-bye it won't do any harm."

"I know my job, thanks," the other returned. "But I wish you'd go up to the house and lock up. I've left the light on, and I think it's visible from the road."

"You are a careless idiot," grumbled the other. But he went back to the lawn, and Wilson came out of his bush.

"Hampstead General Hospital," he said to the driver, "as quick as you can. Rosslyn Hill, on the left. I'm getting in behind. But I shall be covering you still, so mind you run straight. Lights on."

"Right, guv'nor," said the man; and the car shot forward. With his unoccupied hand Wilson cut his client's bonds, and did what he could to make him comfortable. He was still completely unconscious. In a few minutes they stopped outside the hospital.

"The doctor in charge, at once," Wilson said. "It's urgent." In a minute he was helping a hospital orderly to carry Philip Mansfield in at the door. Then he turned back to the driver. But that worthy had no desire to see any more of him. He had kept his engine running, and the instant Mansfield's body was safely out of the car he put her into gear and drove off as fast as he could go. Wilson gave a shout after him, and then, seeing it was useless, made for the telephone. But it took him a full minute to get the Rosslyn Hill police station, and another minute to explain that he wanted XP 7056 stopped at once. He had little hope that it would be stopped before the driver abandoned it. But he had the number, unless it was a false one, and could easily find out whose it was. All the same, it was a pity losing the driver like that. A few minutes' talk with him would probably have cleared up the whole case. And now the odds were that the fellow had gone off to give his accomplice full warning.

Wilson, leaving Mansfield in the hospital's care, ran at full speed to the police station. Just outside he picked up a late taxi returning from depositing a fare. Bidding the man wait he dashed into the station and breathlessly explained his business. He had to tell part of his tale in order to get the police to move, and then it took full five minutes to get the men he wanted ready to start. But at last a police sergeant and a constable climbed into the taxi with him, and set off at full speed for the Pointers' house.

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The front of Lawnwood was all in darkness and there was no sign of the car.

"We shall now see," said Wilson, "whether our friend has slipped straight off, or been up here first to warn his confederates."

The police sergeant gave a resounding knock at the door. There was a brief silence, and then it was opened by Tom Pointer himself.

"Well, that's pretty smart work!" he exclaimed, seeing the uniforms. "Where's Foster?" The sergeant making no reply, Wilson intervened.

"Do you mind telling us the number of your car?" he asked.

"My car!" Pointer stared. "What on earth do you want to know about that for? As a matter of fact, it's XP 7056."

"Is it in the garage?" Wilson went on.

"You're devilish inquisitive," Pointer answered. "No, it isn't. I lent it to a friend for the night."

"What's your friend's name?"

"Foster, though what it has to do with——"

"To Foster?" Wilson turned to the sergeant. "That's the other—not the driver."

"Look here," said Pointer. "If you've got something to say, hadn't you better come inside and say it, instead of keeping me standing on the doorstep? At present, I don't mind telling you I haven't the ghost of an idea what you're driving at."

They filed in after him, into the very smoking-room which Wilson had burgled about an hour before. Tom Pointer splashed out drinks.

"Now then, what's all this about?" he asked.

"It's about Philip Mansfield," said Wilson.

"Well, what about him? I haven't got him here. Haven't seen him for some days. Isn't he found yet?"

"When did you see him last?"

"Three days ago."

"You wrote him a note last night." But this Tom Pointer strenuously denied.

"None the less, Philip Mansfield was in this house last night. Do you deny knowledge of this fact?"

"What rubbish is this? Of course, he wasn't here."

"Mr. Pointer, will you come over here a moment?" Tom Pointer, surprised, followed Wilson across to the curtain. Wilson drew the folds aside, and revealed the scarf pin still sticking in it. "Then how did that get here?"

Pointer bent down and drew it out. "Good God!" he said, "it's Philip's." He seemed thoroughly discomposed. "I can't explain it at all," he added, "but how did you know it was there?"

"Because," said Wilson equably, "I took the liberty of burgling your house earlier in the evening."

"Look here," Pointer answered, "who the devil are you? A policeman?"

"My name is Wilson. I am engaged by Mrs. Mansfield to look into her husband's disappearance."

"Are you *the* Wilson?"

"I believe I am. And I should like to know how you explain the presence of Mr. Mansfield's scarf pin in your curtain."

"I don't explain it," said Pointer. "If Mansfield was in my house last night, it was not at my invitation. I was out all the evening."

"What time did you return home?"

"About midnight." At first Tom Pointer had seemed disposed to resent this cross-examination; but the discovery of the scarf pin had taken all the resistance out of him, and substituted what might have been either mere bewilderment or the embarrassment of guilt. Wilson fancied that it was the former, but he was not sure.

"Was your brother with you all the evening?" he asked.

"Yes. Why? As a matter of fact, we didn't part till after eleven o'clock—just before I went home."

"At the Loggia cinema?"

"You seem to know the hell of a lot," said Pointer. "No, we went on from there to the Café Royal. I left him there. But what's he got to do with this?"

"Have you seen him since?" Wilson asked.

"Yes. In fact, he's in the house now."

"Can we have a few words with him now?"

Pointer, still apparently bewildered, went out to fetch his brother. But a minute or two later he came back alone, looking more perplexed than ever.

"He seems to have gone," he said, "and he was staying the night. I can't make it out."

Wilson asked whether Foster also had been in the house.

"Yes," said Tom Pointer, "he came with my

brother. But he left some time ago to go to the police station. But what in hell is all this about ? ”

“ Mr. Pointer,” said Wilson, “ there is no doubt at all that Philip Mansfield was lured to your house last night by a note which he believed to be in your writing. Here in this room he was kidnapped and his captors drugged him and carried him away. He was imprisoned in the big house next door, and was this evening driven away from there in an unconscious condition, at the orders of your friend Foster. We should therefore like to know what you have to say about it.”

While Wilson was speaking, an expression of increasing consternation overspread Tom Pointer's countenance.

“ It can't be true,” he said.

“ Unfortunately,” said Wilson, “ it is quite true. And, in the circumstances, the sergeant here will have to ask you to hold yourself at the disposal of the police.”

“ Sorry, sir, but that's right, sir,” said the hitherto silent representative of the police.

“ But, I assure you, I don't know a single thing about it,” Tom Pointer rejoined.

“ Well, sergeant, we've done all we can here,” said Wilson, “ Perhaps you will kindly take down Mr. Pointer's statement and get him to sign it. I must be going.” With a few words more, he left Lawnwood and returned at once to the hospital. Mansfield, he found, was still unconscious, and no statement could yet be obtained from him. A few minutes later Wilson was rousing the occupants of

## DISAPPEARANCE OF PHILIP MANSFIELD 135

The Haven, Heathfield Road. Mrs. Mansfield came to an upper window in reply to his knocks.

"It is I—Wilson. All is well. • Will you come down as soon as you can ? "

"You have found Phil ? Is he alive ? "

"Alive, and scarcely hurt," said Wilson, "Come down and I'll explain."

"Thank God," said Mrs. Mansfield, and a minute or two later she appeared at the front door and let Wilson into the house.

As rapidly as he could, Wilson sketched what had happened. He cut short Mrs. Mansfield's fervent thanks. "We've not finished yet," he said. "Your husband, the doctor tells me, is in no way seriously hurt, but he may remain unconscious for some hours, and be too weak to be disturbed when he comes to. Now, clearly these men had some special reason for wanting him out of the way till to-morrow evening—I mean this evening—that is clear from what I heard Foster say. I don't know what their reason was, but unless I do I can't be sure of spoiling their plans."

"Can't you arrest them? Have you told the police?"

"I went straight to the police from the hospital, and they are hunting for Foster and Adolphus Pointer. I hope they will get on their track at once. But, unless I know what their plot is, I can't be sure that even their arrest will stop it. I want you to think, Mrs. Mansfield. Is there any conceivable reason why Foster or Pointer, or anyone else, should want your husband out of the way till midday to-morrow ? "



"I don't know, Mr. Wilson. I don't understand at all."

"Perhaps," said Wilson, "it may help you to remember if I tell you what Mr. Mansfield came to consult me about before he disappeared. He had discovered that he had been defrauded over his management of the Megatherium, and with my assistance he had narrowed down the search for the guilty man to Foster or Adolphus Pointer or both. The day before yesterday, in answer to a letter of mine sending him some additional proofs, I got a note saying that he must think the whole thing over carefully before acting. The same night he vanishes from the Pointers' house, and twenty-four hours later I find him unconscious in a car brought up by Foster under the orders of Adolphus Pointer. Does that help you at all?"

Mrs. Mansfield's expression had passed through every variety of amazement during this abrupt statement, but she appeared none the wiser.

"I don't know of anything that was to happen to-morrow. Phil didn't tell me, if there was."

Wilson tried a last forlorn chance.

"Was there *nothing at all* due to happen to-morrow to you or your husband? Something even that might be quite unconnected with this?"

"No, I don't think so."

"You're *certain*? Think as hard as you can."

"The only thing I can think of," said Mrs. Mansfield, "and that's absurd, was that my sister left a letter here two days ago which she made me promise I wouldn't open till to-morrow evening."

Wilson thought. "Absurd or not, you must open it now," he said. "We can't run risks."

"But ought I to, when I promised?"

"Under the circumstances, I think you certainly should," said Wilson gravely.

"It seems rather mean," said Mrs. Mansfield, but she went to her bureau and took out a letter. As she read it she gave a horrified exclamation.

"What is it?" Wilson asked.

"My sister is going to marry Dolly Pointer to-morrow—I mean, this morning," she gasped. "She wouldn't tell me, she says, because Phil would try and stop it. I suppose he would, if what you say is true. But—what can that have to do with——?"

"Has your sister any money?"

"Two thousand a year of her own."

"Yes. Well—and your husband might not be anxious to prosecute his brother-in-law for fraud," Wilson said. "Well, we can stop that bit, anyway. What is your sister's address?"

Mrs. Mansfield gave it. "But—*Dolly Pointer*," she said in a bewildered tone, "I can hardly believe it. Why, we know him quite well."

"How exactly do we stand?" said Inspector Blaikie of Scotland Yard when Wilson went to see him the next morning. "Of course, it's easy enough to see more or less what happened, but how are we placed for getting a conviction? We've got Adolphus Pointer and Foster, and we can get Tom Pointer if we want him, but we've not got the

other man, and we've really no idea who he is. And, as I see it, I'm doubtful if we've enough to be sure of a conviction. First, you say you think Tom Pointer's out of it, but we've got his letter we found in Mansfield's pocket, and our handwriting people say there's no doubt he wrote it. Against Foster we've your evidence, but nothing else. Mansfield never saw him when he was in captivity. And against Adolphus Pointer we've really nothing beyond your evidence of what Foster said about him in your hearing, and, of course, the fact that Mansfield's temporary disappearance was mighty convenient for him. Is it good enough? That's what worries me. Of course, he and Foster will both be prosecuted for fraud on the other business but I'd rather like to give them a hint that kidnapping isn't a proper way to get out of corners."

"We want the other man to talk, in fact," said Wilson. "Well, we'll have to do our best. D'you feel like coming with me to the matinée of Tom Pointer's play, *The Gay Young Things*, this afternoon, Blaikie?"

"No, why? Pretty fair tripe, isn't it?"

"Absolutely rotten. I saw it last week. But come—with a warrant."

Blaikie sat up suddenly in his chair.

"A warrant," he exclaimed. "In whose name, please? You've got something up your sleeve."

"Make it out in the name of Henry Rubinstein, Blaikie."

"Never heard of him," said the inspector, "but have it, your own way."

## DISAPPEARANCE OF PHILIP MANSFIELD 139

Blaikie surveyed his programme with care. No one of the name of Rubinstein appeared among the actors. He watched Wilson as much as he watched the play. He was sure Wilson was waiting for something. A young actor, Douglas Gordon, with a remarkably good voice, was singing the song whose refrain all London was humming, "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise."

"Come on, Blaikie," said Wilson, and guided the inspector swiftly behind the scenes. The act was just ending.

"Look at your programme," said Wilson, "Henry Rubinstein is the private name of Douglas Gordon. The warrant, Blaikie. Quick, before he's off."

"Henry Rubinstein," said Blaikie, "I arrest you for being concerned in the assault upon and the abduction of Philip Mansfield. And I warn you——"

The young actor had started back as the inspector began to speak. His eyes fell on Wilson.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he said. "I thought you offered me a getaway. Well, it looks like a clean cop." He appeared to take his troubles lightly. "But how did you trail me?"

"It all came of singing at your work, Mr. Rubinstein." Wilson sang softly, "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise." The actor stared.

"Good Lord! Did I sing that tripe last night?"

"You did, and I thought your voice familiar at the time. But it was not till this morning that it came over me who you must be."

"Well, you've got me," said Rubinstein. "Congratulations."

"I'm glad you take it so well," Wilson answered, "and as I don't suppose you want a term in gaol, you'd better tell me all about it, and agree to give evidence for the Crown."

"Oh, no," said the young man. "That would be spoiling sport." He glanced at his watch with a mischievous look. But he changed his tune when Wilson told him of Dolly Pointer's defalcations, of which he had known nothing, and of his plan to marry into Mansfield's family, and so secure himself against prosecution. He had been told only that Mansfield was putting unreasonable objections in the way of Pointer's marriage, and needed to be kept safely out of the way until it was an accomplished fact. No violence, he declared, had ever been meant, so far as he was concerned. He had only undertaken to help in kidnapping Mansfield and keeping him safe till the marriage was over. But, when Mansfield had offered unexpected resistance in Tom Pointer's smoking-room, and had been near getting away, Foster had hit him over the head and knocked him out. Rubinstein said he had protested, but had not seen how to stop half-way. He had helped Foster tie Mansfield up, but somehow he must have recovered consciousness enough before this was done to stick his tie pin into the curtain as a clue for the investigators of his disappearance to follow. Thereafter, Foster and Rubinstein had carried him across to the empty house, and Rubinstein had stayed with him until Foster arrived and ordered his removal to the car.

Wilson, as he listened to the actor's story, began

to fear that even now he had secured no definite evidence of Dolly Pointer's part in the conspiracy, beyond the fact that he could be shown to have borrowed the car from his brother. He asked from whom Rubinstein had received his instructions.

"Why, I thought you knew—from Dolly Pointer, of course. He arranged it all."

"And Tom Pointer," Wilson asked. "Was he in it?"

"Not on your life. Tom's not that sort. Dolly never meant him to learn anything about it."

"Then how about the note in his handwriting—the one that was used to decoy Mansfield to Lawnwood?"

Rubinstein laughed. "Oh, that's simple," he said. "It was a perfectly genuine note which Dolly found lying about in a blotter at Lawnwood and collared. Tom Pointer had written it ~~some~~ time and then not sent it. And it came in mighty handy . . . But, I say!" he looked up from his watch in horror. "He'll have *married* the girl by now. Foster was to have been his best man. What a mucky thing to do!"

"Oh, we stopped that, for the moment," Wilson said. "But we want your help to stop it for good."

His help and that of Philip Mansfield were in great evidence when the conspirators were tried for kidnapping. Mansfield, as soon as he was well enough to speak, fully corroborated Rubinstein's evidence and Wilson's connection, even to his having

stuck his scarf pin in the curtain as a last desperate attempt to leave a clue of his whereabouts.

Adolphus Pointer, still unmarried, fought hard, on the strength of his alibi, to show that the crime had been planned by Foster without his knowledge. Foster, on the other hand, declared that he had been only a tool in Adolphus Pointer's hands, and was able to prove that Pointer had got the lion's share of the stolen money. But, apart from this, Rubinstein's evidence was fatal to him. Adolphus Pointer is at present reposing in a very safe place. Foster, who got a less severe sentence, will be out again soon, and Rubinstein was discharged with a caution. He at any rate is not likely to play such dangerous games again. Indeed, he has become quite a friend of Wilson's, and that influence will probably keep him steady. Tom Pointer and the Mansfields are as fast friends as ever, and Wilson, when he runs into any of them, which happens quite often, expresses the wish that all his cases would work out as smoothly as the Disappearance of Philip Mansfield.

## THE ROBBERY AT BOWDEN

### I

MR. HENRY WILSON, one-time superintendent of the C.I.D., and now one of London's most famous private detectives, contemplated the murky street with grave disgust before sitting down to his eggs and bacon. It was not a nice morning, nor was a small town in the North of England, entirely devoted to the mining industry, likely to reconcile anyone to a cold February drizzle, even in 1924, before the black depression of unemployment had overtaken the district. Wilson had seldom seen so wholly dismal or so dirty a place. From his window, over the roofs of the low houses opposite, was visible the wheel of the nearest shaft belonging to the great colliery which practically owned the town and the lives of its few thousand inhabitants; the reek of coal dust was in the air; and the very money which changed hands in the town was blacker than any Wilson had seen elsewhere in England. He returned to his breakfast, thinking with relief that, the business which had taken him up north being now satisfactorily completed, he could say good-bye to his niece, Jean Grant, and return with a clear conscience to the comparative cleanliness of London.

Jean Grant, the child of his only sister, was the one of all Wilson's small stock of relatives of whom



he was fondest ; and if he was inclined to think, as doting uncles frequently are, that his pet had married beneath her, he was honest enough to admit that, beyond a certain impression of weakness and futility, there was nothing definite against the young man—and Jean, he was sure, had character enough for two, or she would not so long have endured life in this dismal Bowden, with no interest but her husband, her two-year old daughter, and the baby that was on the way. Franklin Grant was cashier to the Bowden Colliery Company, a job which paid moderately well and looked at present as permanent as most ; but this did not mean anything like affluence, and Jean had to work fairly hard to make ends meet on their income. Indeed, when Wilson had gone to have supper with them two or three nights ago, he had been inclined to fancy, in spite of his niece's determined cheerfulness, that things were rather tighter than usual. Frank Grant had looked pale and sullen, and there was a wrinkle of anxiety between Jean's brows. He had just made up his mind that he would go round after breakfast and try and find out exactly what the matter was, and if a temporary loan would be of service, when there was a knock at his door, and the object of his reflections walked in. This time, at any rate, there was no mistake. Jean's usually bright, rosy face was pale and lined with worry.

"Uncle Harry," she began, after the merest preliminary, "must you really go back to town to-day ?"

"I ought to. I've some work waiting to be done.

But what is it, my dear ? ” said Wilson, putting her into the only arm-chair and pouring her out some coffee. “ What is wrong ? ”

“ I don’t know ! ” said Jean, with wide open anxious eyes. “ I don’t even know for certain that anything is. But I feel—I don’t know—that something’s going to happen at any moment. Frank’s ill, for one thing.”

“ I’m sorry to hear that. Not anything serious, I hope ? ”

“ No—o, I don’t think so. Only a chill. He went out for a long walk last night, and got wet through. And this morning he was too ill to get up. But he’s very miserable, poor dear, and more—worried, I think, than he ought to be.”

“ Money ? ” Wilson asked. She threw him a grateful look.

“ Yes, partly. We’ve been spending too much lately. It’s awfully difficult to keep things down—and then there’ve been doctor’s bills. We couldn’t think what to do about the new baby—how to pay for it. But . . . we’ve known that a long time—no reason for Frank suddenly to go off the deep end. He was in a dreadfully black mood when he came home last night, and this morning . . . he was more dismal than I’ve ever seen him. He talked about killing himself.”

“ Silly goose,” said Wilson, making a mental note to give young Grant a good shake when he saw him next. “ But a touch of ’flu reduces strong men to despair, you know. I shouldn’t worry, if that’s all.”

“ It isn’t all—not quite. When he couldn’t get

up this morning I left Diana next door and went to find Dr. Durrant, and to the office to say he wouldn't be coming to work. And as soon as I got there I saw <sup>up</sup>that something extraordinary must have happened. Everybody was buzzing in and out and talking in sort of hisses, and when I said Frank couldn't come they looked at me very oddly, and someone just whispered 'I should think not!' I don't know how to explain to you . . . it sounds ridiculous, but I got quite frightened. I wondered if perhaps Frank had got sacked yesterday, and hadn't dared to tell me, and if that was why he seemed so queer. Anyway, I felt just as if something were going to fall on my head, and I didn't know what to do or how to face it—we've hardly any friends here, you know. And I wondered . . . if you could have stayed . . . just another day or two, till I know what's really wrong. But, of course, if you've got to go back——"

As she ended her appeal she leaned back in her chair, looking so forlorn in spite of herself that Wilson had already resolved to let his London business slide for a day at least, when there came another knock at his door. He went to open it and could not wholly repress a movement of surprise. For outside stood a large man in the uniform of a sergeant of police. Unfortunately, the arm-chair was placed just opposite the door, and Jean Grant saw both his movement and its cause. She went white and gripped the arm of the chair.

"Has—has anything happened?" she asked

breathlessly. The sergeant hummed and hawed and seemed disposed to postpone disclosure.

"Get on, man!" Wilson said impatiently. "Whatever you've got to tell, delaying only makes it worse."

"It's Mr. Grant, sir," the sergeant got out at last.

"Injured?" Wilson asked.

"No, sir. Arrested."

"What for?" Wilson went on, feeling rather than seeing that the girl beside him was beyond speech.

"For—stealing the colliery pay-roll and assaulting the manager."

"W—what!" Something which might have been a cackle of laughter broke from Frank Grant's wife. "But—how ridiculous! What an idea!" She laughed again. "Why, Uncle Harry, I was quite—quite frightened at first . . . I thought something must have happened to Frank. But this—stealing the pay-roll . . . it's so *silly*, isn't it?"

"Silly or not," said the sergeant, rather up in arms, "we've had to arrest him."

"You don't mean you've taken him to the police station! But he's ill—he oughtn't to go out! And . . . it's absurd! *Frank* steal and assault people! Uncle Harry, tell him they must let him go!"

"Steady," said Wilson, who felt that there was much too much hysteria in the girl's way of taking the news. "Let's hear all about it first. What happened, sergeant?"

"Well, sir, it's like this, pretty well," the sergeant

began. He appeared to be slightly embarrassed by the position in which he found himself, and endeavoured to address himself solely to Wilson. "Thursday night there was an attempted burglary at the colliery. The burglars, whoever they were, didn't succeed in blowing the safe open, but damaged it so much that it couldn't be undone yesterday. Mr. Grant found it and reported it to Mr. Franks, the manager; and Mr. Franks told him to keep it dark for to-day and meanwhile to telephone the bank which sends down the money for Saturday pay-day—they pay on Saturday here, you know—to hold it up till Saturday morning."

"Why, is it usually sent on Friday?"

"Yes, sir. The bank's at Horden—there isn't a local branch nearer—and the first train from Horden in the morning doesn't get in till after eleven; so they send it overnight to make sure they have it ready for the men coming off the morning shift. It's lodged in the colliery safe for the night—that's why they have such a strong one. But the safe being out of action, Mr. Franks wanted the bank advised not to send the money down overnight. Mr. Grant, however, omitted to do so, and the bank messenger accordingly arrived at six o'clock last night; and Mr. Franks, not having anywhere else to put the money, decided to take it home with him to his own house. He put it under his pillow when he went to bed; but in the night he was chloroformed and the money stolen."

"How much money, do you know?"

"Matter of seven thousand pounds, sir, in pound

and ten shilling notes," said the sergeant. "Very easy to dispose of, so it's important to lay hands on the man quickly, sir."

"And in your view Mr. Grant is the man?"

"Inspector Watling has it in hand, sir," was the reply. "I understand Mr. Grant was the only person who knew about the safe and where the money was—and that he has failed to give an account of his whereabouts last night. The inspector asked me to step around and inform the lady, seeing she wasn't at home."

"It's ridiculous! It's the silliest thing I ever heard!" Jean Grant, a spot of red in each white cheek, proclaimed. "*Frank* . . . how could anybody be so absurd? Of course it's a mistake. But—they mustn't keep him in the police station; he's ill, he ought to be in bed. How can I get him out, Uncle?"

"Gently, my dear," Wilson, still with an uneasy watch on her face, admonished her. "We'll see about it directly. I suppose," he said to the sergeant, "there'll be no difficulty in seeing Mr. Grant? I am this lady's uncle, and, so far as I know, his only near relative." The sergeant seemed to think that the authorities would be amenable. "Then you can leave her to me, can't you? You've broken the news; you can see it's a shock; and that she'd better have a little time to get over it quietly. If you or the inspector want anything later, I am sure she will do what she can for you. But for the present——" With firm persuasiveness he got the sergeant out of the room almost before

that dignitary had realised what was happening, and turned back to Jean.

"Oh, isn't it a *silly* idea?" the latter said again; and forthwith went off into a peal of laughter so near hysterics that Wilson had to devote some minutes to quieting her down before he could do anything else.

"And now, my child," he remarked, when her calm was at length restored and she had apologised somewhat shamefacedly for her behaviour, "we'd better think this over."

"I want to see him—please!" said Jean. "And I want you to see him. That is, if you'll stay and help such a pair of geese."

"Of course I'll help," said Wilson. "And if I'm to help, I certainly must see him. But first I want to find out one or two things, and particularly what the evidence is on which they're holding him."

"But he didn't do it!"

"You're certain of that?"

"Why, of course . . . Uncle Harry, what *do* you mean? Why, it's ridiculous, don't you see?"

"Then what was it you thought he might have done? No, Jean, don't be foolish, my dear. I've known you some time, and I *know* that when the sergeant said he was arrested you were afraid of something. Tell me what it was."

"You're very quick," said Jean a little resentfully. "But I told you. I was afraid he'd been sacked."

"People don't get arrested for being sacked. It was the word *arrested* that frightened you—I saw

it. Come, Jean, can't you trust me? I can't help you or Frank, you know, if you keep things back. Was it anything to do with money?" he asked, as the girl sat silent, with wide, frightened eyes. An almost imperceptible nod. "What was it? You thought he'd done—what did you think he'd done?"

"I don't know—I don't know anything," the girl said in a whisper. "I was only afraid . . . when he came home yesterday night, he was so queer. And he'd had a row with Mr. Franks; he said so. And we'd been getting so hard up, I was afraid—that—that——"

"That perhaps he'd been getting into trouble with the books?" Wilson helped her. She nodded gratefully.

"But it was only thinking. He didn't say a word to suggest it, and he hadn't at any time. But you know how—silly one can get. I was just imagining the worst that could possibly happen. And then when he was out and didn't come in till so late——"

"What time *did* he come in?"

"Not till half-past two. And he was dreadfully wet and miserable."

"Where had he been?"

"I don't know," Jean said. "For a walk and lost himself, he said. We'd been to supper with some people a few doors off—Goodenough, their name is. We left about ten, but Frank wouldn't come in. He said he'd a bad headache and wanted to walk it off. It wasn't raining then, but began later. Then he didn't come in and I was frightfully worried—you know what one gets like in the—"



middle of the night. And when he did he was so wretched, poor creature, and rather cross with me for fussing, so I didn't like to bother him about where he'd been."

"I see," said Wilson, and remained a few seconds lost in thought. "Now, Jean, what have you done with Diana all this while?"

"She's with the Heywoods, next door," Jean said. "They're very good about taking her. Why?"

"Because I think you'd better get back and have a look at her. No, I mean it seriously. If I'm to help Frank, it means finding out exactly what there is against him, and that means seeing him and talking to him. And I think he'll talk more happily if you aren't there. You shall see him, of course, but I want to see him first. Now will you let me?"

When Wilson had made up his mind to a thing there were few who could resist him. Unwilling as she was to wait even half an hour before knowing the worst, Jean Grant agreed to go home and look after her little daughter, and Wilson made his way as rapidly as he could to the police-station.

## II

It was not only in order to spare Franklin Grant's feelings that Wilson had insisted on interviewing him alone. He was, as a matter of fact, considerably more disquieted than he had allowed to appear; and when he had reached the police station and had

a talk with Inspector Watling he was not by any means relieved.

For Inspector Watling was quite certain that he had got the thief. "It's common enough knowledge hereabouts," he said, "that Mr. Grant's been in a hole for money for some time. I daresay his good lady doesn't know, but he spends more than a bit on cards and so on, and lately he's been betting, in order, I fancy, to try and put things right. And that, as you know, is a mug's game. I've often said to myself that it was taking a pretty big risk to have a man in Grant's financial position in charge of the cash, but I always supposed that Mr. Franks knew his own business best. But I think he was getting a bit suspicious himself—anyway, they had a stand-up row at the office last night. Mr. Franks wasn't well enough, when I went up this morning, to tell me much, but I gather he was thinking of discharging the young man, if indeed he hadn't actually done so. And of course that would simply have put the lid on it for Grant.

"Now as to yesterday. The most important point is that it was only Grant who knew the condition the safe was in. The safe's not in the ordinary office, it's in an inner room—Mr. Franks's—which is not opened in the morning until Grant goes to take the letters in. When he did so, yesterday morning, he found that the place had been bungled, and that though the thieves hadn't got into the safe they had damaged it so much that it couldn't be opened. Grant didn't say anything to anybody, but simply locked up the inner office.

again until Mr. Franks came. Mr. Franks then told him to keep his own counsel, and to telephone to the bank at Horden telling them to send the money down on the morning instead of the evening train. It's a 'lot of cash, you see. The colliery employs over two thousand, and they're paid weekly in silver and treasury notes—a lot of very easily disposed-of stuff."

"Did Mr. Franks report the burglary?" Wilson interrupted.

"Not till to-day. There was nothing taken, you see. Well, as I was saying, Grant was the only one who knew the safe was out of order and couldn't be put right in time—there's no one in the neighbourhood who could manage a job like that. Well, about five o'clock he told Mr. Franks he'd forgotten to telephone—too late to stop the money coming through—and he and Mr. Franks had a row about that and some other things. The upshot was that Mr. Franks went to meet the bank messenger himself, got the money off him, and took it home to his house. He went to bed about eleven with the cash under his pillow, having nowhere safer to put it. In the morning his servant couldn't wake him for some time. When she did, she found him feeling very ill, and the money gone. When the doctor came, he said he'd been chloroformed. And young Grant, on his own statement, was out of his house, doing nothing in particular, between ten and two-thirty on a wet February night. That's the gist of what we've got on him, and it's my belief he'll find it a hard job to answer."

"I see," said Wilson. "Is it your opinion that he damaged the safe himself?"

"Oh, no, I don't think he did," was the answer. "I don't think he did anything more than jump at the chance when he got it—though that's bad enough in all conscience. I don't think he has the guts to plan out a big scoop. Besides, there was a blowpipe and dynamite used on the safe. You can see it if you like"—the inspector was quite aware of Wilson's identity and profession. "No, whoever monkeyed about with the safe was a pro., in my opinion. But he bit off a bit more than he could chew—that safe's a triple steel-lined affair you'd not expect to find in a place this size—and all he did was to fix up a nice job for our Mr. Grant."

"I see," Wilson said again. "Well, may I see him? I'm more or less representing his wife, who's a niece of mine, you know. I'll engage not to do anything improper."

"Oh, we'll trust you, sir," the inspector chuckled. "You won't find him much to look at, though. He's got a bit of a cold, and seems in a miserable way altogether. That's the worst of amateurs, they don't know how to take a set-back."

The "set-back" must be pretty considerable, Wilson reflected, if Franklin Grant were really the thief; but he had hardly expected to find so wretched a creature as now lay shivering, and curled up on the floor of the station cell. The "bit of a cold," which looked more like a severe chill, may have had something to do with it; but even a drink out of Wilson's flask and the loan of

his great-coat did little to amend the condition of the prisoner, who sat huddled up in a corner with his head in his hands, bemoaning his fate.

"Now, Fränk, that's enough," Wilson said at last. "For Jean's sake, and your child's, if not for your own, you've got to pull yourself together. Did you steal this money, or did you not?"

"No, I didn't!" Grant said, with a faint flash of spirit. "I don't expect you to believe me, but I didn't."

"If anyone's to believe you," Wilson said with asperity, "you'll have to make up your mind to answer questions like a man, and not sniff like a baby. I'm anxious to help you, if you are innocent, but I can't help you if you won't help yourself. Where were you between ten and two-thirty last night?"

"Walking about."

"Where?"

"I don't know. That is"—as Wilson impatiently shrugged his shoulders—"I wasn't anywhere in particular. I went for a walk up by the canal, and I turned across the fields by Brooklands mill and got into the wood up there and got lost. It was dark and I missed my way. I don't know where I went. Just wandered about."

"Did you meet anybody?"

"Not that I remember. It was too late. They'd all be in bed."

"And why weren't you?"

"Oh, I wanted a walk. I was bothered, and felt miserable."

"What about?"

"Didn't you hear? I had a row with Franks."

"What about?"

"Oh, things generally. He went for me, the way he does, about slackness, etc. • I'm sure I do twice the work he does!" said Franklin in a complaining tone. "And I was going to try and ask him for a rise, too. No use, of course. It wasn't my fault the damned telephone was out of order."

"I thought you forgot to ring up."

"Well, I didn't. I couldn't get through. I did mean to go round to the post office and see about it, but it slipped my memory. Anyway, they're so slack, they wouldn't have done anything about it."

"Did you think you'd get a rise?"

"I didn't think there was any harm in trying. I ought to have had one two years ago, but Franks believes in keeping us in our places—ask anyone in the office. I've been four years on five quid a week, and what's a chap to do?"

"What *did* a chap do?" Wilson asked significantly. At the question the remnant of colour left Franklin Grant's face, and he stared up at his uncle in obvious terror.

"What do you mean? Oh, I don't know. Mucked about, and tried to make it up somehow. Of course, I've been a damned fool, I know that. Oh, hell, I do feel rotten! I think I've got 'flu." He sunk his head in his hands again.

"Frank." Wilson did not believe that mere extravagance, even gambling, could have produced

that expression of terror. "Frank, what exactly have you been doing? You'd better tell me, you know; it's bound to come out," he added, seeing a mulish expression replace the fright.

It took a good deal more questioning to drag out the truth, which did not surprise Wilson when he had at last learnt it. It appeared that the foolish young man, as his wife had half surmised, had taken the last desperate means of mending his fortune, and had "borrowed" from the money committed to his charge. This, of course, had involved a temporary (or assumed to be temporary) alteration of the books; and though, unlike most gamblers, Franklin Grant had been fortunate enough in his last throw to enable him to pay back his theft, he had only known this at midday on the Friday, not early enough to enable him to restore his books to honesty before the dispute with Mr. Franks which had culminated in his being ordered off the premises. Hence his fear, knowing that with his arrest his books would almost certainly be examined, and that, even if the defalcations were not considered proof against him of the major crime, he would be clearly shown to have committed a felony.

"You can't say anything to me that I don't know," he said gloomily, as he finished the usual tale of a weak man's downfall—a meagre salary, an operation on his child, doctor's bills hanging round his neck, tradesmen unpaid, insurance mortgaged, the prospect of a little easy gain leading to the certainty of a heavy loss, and so on. "Nobody could have been more of a miserable, weak-minded

idiot. But I swear I'd nothing to do with this—I never touched the notes, never thought of it. I don't expect—can't expect, I suppose, to be believed, but on my soul it's true. And if you can do anything to help, Uncle . . . to help Jean, I mean . . . I swear I didn't do it."

"I'll see what I can do," Wilson promised non-committally. Indeed, he was not quite certain whether to believe the young man or not. "I'll see about getting a solicitor, and meanwhile I must go back to Jean. I shall have to tell her all you've told me, you realise? Right. Then we'll see. I suppose you're absolutely certain you've told me everything—not kept anything back. That's fatal, you know."

"I've told you everything," his nephew said mournfully. "I don't suppose you'll believe it though." And on that note they parted. —

### III

Wilson returned into the inspector's office, where he found a large and very angry man marching up and down the room and gesticulating. Mr. Franks, for so Wilson conjectured him to be, had probably not been improved by his dose of chloroform, but he could not have been a pleasant creature at the best of times. He had one of those pale, puffy faces to which a hard, thin mouth and an opaque blue eye combine to give the maximum of unpleasantness; his neck hung over his coat-collar, and he was



imperfectly washed and shaved. As he surveyed him, Wilson felt the first stirrings of sympathy for the young man in the cell. Four years under Mr. Franks, without a rise, would have tried anybody's character—though that was hardly an excuse for theft. But at the moment Mr. Franks had the floor.

"Here he is at last!" he bellowed to the inspector. "Now, 'sir, do you know what your precious nephew's done?"

"Stolen the money from your house, do you mean?" Wilson asked with purposely aggravating calm. "He assures me he hasn't."

"Assures you be damned! He can assure himself black in the face! I suppose he'll assure you he's always kept his books straight next!"

"No," said Wilson, still more calmly. "He has just confessed to me that he has been tampering

"The impudent scoundrel!" shouted Mr. Franks.

"By the way," said Wilson to the inspector, "were you thinking of getting a doctor to him? I think he's ill, you know, and the atmosphere of your cell in February isn't likely to cure him. And what about bail? If you'll accept it, I will willingly go bail to any reasonable amount."

"You'll do nothing of the sort, Watling!" Mr. Franks snorted. "I shall object strongly. Letting him out to run off with his swag!"

The Inspector looked unhappy. "I'm afraid I can't consent to bail, for the present, anyway, Mr. Wilson," he said. "You see, unfortunately,

the stuff's so easy to dispose of, being all in treasury notes, of which the bank doesn't keep the numbers. We daren't give a chance of disposing of them. And Mr. Franks, who signed the warrant, naturally objects. But I'll certainly get in a doctor and see what he says. And if he's ill, we'll see what can be done."

"Oh, so Mr. Franks is a magistrate, is he?" said Wilson, surveying that angry pillar of the law. "Well, perhaps Mr. Franks wouldn't mind telling me exactly on what information he made his warrant out?"

"Why," Franks spluttered, "the man climbed in at my window, chloroformed me, and made off with the cash! Isn't that good enough for you?"

"But if you were chloroformed," Wilson said mildly, "you presumably didn't see him do all this. What makes you think he did?"

"Look here, are you mad? The money's gone, someone's climbed in over the portico, Grant's been monkeying around with the books, and he's the only one who knew the money wasn't in the safe. What more do you want?"

"Are there marks on the portico?"

"Yes!"

"Will you show me them? And can you tell me just what you did with the money when you received it from the messenger?"

"No, I won't!" Franks roared. "I'm a busy man and I've wasted enough time this morning already! If what I know isn't enough for a conviction, all I can say is that the courts must be mighty funny places."

"Oh, I've no doubt you can get a conviction," Wilson said, "if that's all you want. But, you see, the young man happens to be my nephew, and I'm rather anxious he shouldn't be convicted if he's not guilty. I don't know how you feel about it, of course, but I should very much appreciate your co-operation."

There was a few seconds' conflict of wills, at the end of which Wilson, as usual, had his way. Mr. Franks agreed to tell all he knew, which, however, did not turn out to be much. He had met the bank's emissary on the 6.15 train, and had taken from him the money in a suitcase. Then he had gone to his club and dined, leaving the suitcase in the cloakroom. After dinner he had played bridge and walked home with a friend, arriving about 10.30 with the suitcase. He had gone to bed at eleven, locking the silver from the suitcase in his wardrobe, and putting the notes, about whose safety he was more anxious, under his pillow. He had gone to sleep almost directly, and had not wakened until half-past eight, feeling very sick and sorry for himself. When he regained consciousness, the first thing he noticed was that notes and silver were both gone; and the doctor, who had been hastily sent for, attributed his condition to a strong dose of chloroform. Immediately, then, he had sent for the police, and issued a warrant against Franklyn Grant; and when he got to his office, had at once set to and examined the books, in which he found undeniable evidence of falsification. Armed with this fresh evidence, he had gone to the police station, where Wilson had found him.

"Thank you," said Wilson, when he had finished. "And when you met the messenger, was there anyone about? Anyone who could have seen the suitcase change hands?"

Franks stared. "I don't know. I suppose there was. There are generally half a dozen coming off that train. Grant wasn't there, if that's what you mean. But he didn't need to be. I'd told him what I meant to do—more fool me."

"And you weren't followed home from your club as far as you know?"

"No. I tell you, he knows my house as well as I know it myself."

"Thank you. But I don't know your house. May I see it—the way the thief is assumed to have got in, I mean? I won't disturb anything."

Mr. Franks obviously did not like this request, but eventually he gave a reluctant consent, and turned to leave the station.

"By the way," Wilson remarked as he was going, "isn't £5 a week rather a small salary to work for during four years, without a rise? Isn't it rather a temptation?"

Mr. Franks's face went yellow with anger. "I pay my staff what it's worth," he said. "And I don't care for interference from outsiders! I'll see you later, Watling." And he was gone.

"What's Mr. Franks's financial standing?" Wilson asked casually, before he went.

"Oh, all right, I think." The inspector looked up sharply. "Why—you're not hinting, are you, that he——"

"Oh, I don't know. But, you see, you're obviously not correct in saying that only my nephew knew that the money wasn't in the safe. Mr. Franks knew, for one."

"I see. But I think you're wrong there, Mr. Wilson, if you'll excuse my saying so. Mr. Franks is a hard man, everyone knows, and keeps his people in their places. But I've never heard a word against his character."

"I see. Well, of course you're in a better position to know. By the way, I meant to ask you—what's my nephew supposed to have done with the money? I suppose you've searched his house?"

"Yes. It's not there. Must be hidden somewhere," the inspector said. "I suppose you couldn't persuade him to tell us where. It'd make it a bit better——" He stopped short, realising the implications.

Wilson laughed. "Don't take *all* your views from Mr. Franks, Watling," he said as he walked out.

The manager's house was a perfectly ordinary stucco-fronted building with a small pillared portico and windows either side. The constable who was on duty keeping off sightseers informed Wilson that the window to the right on the first floor was that of the burgled bedroom. "He went up the portico with a rope, sir, and swung himself in. You can see the marks on the pillar."

"Yes," said Wilson, looking at them. "That's a rope certainly. He must be an agile fellow. And here's what looks like his footprint. I fancy he mis-stepped, coming down with his weight, and got on this muddy patch of gravel."

"I don't know as anybody's seen that, sir," said the policeman, looking with interest at the clear mark of a tennis shoe on the side of the path where the gravel had worn thin. "Cute of him to wear rubber soles."

"Quite," Wilson dryly agreed, taking out his notebook and beginning to draw a facsimile of the print. "I should take care that isn't disturbed, if I were you. It was made after the rain, I see. What time did the rain stop last night?"

"Two o'clock, about, sir," said the constable.

"Then that doesn't tell us anything. May I go up to the bedroom?"

The constable, having summoned another to keep watch, went up with him, and they examined the bedroom together.

"No marks of the rope on the window sill," said Wilson. "He must have swung himself in. But it's a pretty good stretch." He leaned out. "I doubt whether I could climb in from that portico. Could you?"

"I could not, sir," said the constable with emphasis. He was a good three inches shorter than Wilson and not built for climbing.

"I'm just six feet. It's odd, rather," Wilson said. "Nevertheless, he *did* climb in, for here's his rubber sole on the window ledge. Look, that muddy

mark. You can only see a bit of it, but it's obviously the same pattern. Now, then, what did he do next?"

"Chloroformed Mr. Franks, sir," said the constable.

"Yes. Ever tried chloroforming anyone, Hawkins? It's not so easy as it sounds. They're apt to struggle and kick, and you may easily give them too much. It wants a cool hand. But here's our man, all the same—standing by the bed, I think. There's a muddy mark—a little one, but it's still wet. But this is odd, though." He was feeling the carpet with his fingers round the indicated spot.

"What is, sir?"

"The rest of the carpet's bone dry."

"But," said the constable, "you said it had stopped raining when he came."

"Yes, I did. But . . . well, let's see. He dopes Mr. Franks and gets the notes from beneath his pillow. Did he put them in their own suitcase, by the way, or bring one of his own?"

"One of his own, sir. Mr. Franks's is still here, by his bed."

"Yes, yes. An agile, provident creature, wasn't he? Now, then, the silver. From the wardrobe. But how did he know it was in the wardrobe?"

"Perhaps," suggested the constable, "Mr. Franks had told him he was going to put it there?"

"Perhaps. Or he may have been watched from the road. See here. There's only this light over the bed"—he switched it on—"but it's unusually strong. If Mr. Franks had it on while he was making his preparations for bed, all that he was

doing could have been quite clearly seen from the road or the front path, even if the blind was down. Well, it may not be important. Let's look at the wardrobe."

"Looks as if it had been unlocked, sir," said the constable.

"It does. But it hasn't. It's been forced. But the markings are very faint. That's one of the most neatly forced locks I've ever seen—and in the dark, too! Of course, it's not really a difficult lock. Um—m—m." He prowled about the room for a little while, looking at various objects.

"Well, I think that's all I want to see here. I'll get along to Mrs. Grant's. Can you tell me, by the way, the names of any lodging houses or pubs in Bowden where a man might put up for a few nights—not too low-class?" He took down the names in a notebook, and proceeded to the Grants' house, on the way going into the post office in order to send off a long telegram in code to his friend and late colleague, Inspector Blaikie, of New Scotland Yard.

He found Jean Grant obviously in great anxiety, which she was endeavouring pluckily to keep in check the while she administered dinner to Diana, her small daughter, and tried to invent new reasons why daddy had not come home. He repeated to her the gist of Franklin's tale, at which her passionate pity entirely outweighed her alarm—"Oh, poor Frank! Why couldn't he have told me?" she said again and again. Wilson tried to comfort her, and finished by a very guarded hint that, black as things looked at present, there was still hope.



"There's only one thing I want to know," he said. "Had Frank a mackintosh with him last night?"

"No; not even an overcoat. It was quite fine and warm when we went out. That's how he caught cold, of course—getting so wet."

"He ~~was~~ very wet, was he?"

"Absolutely drenched, poor boy. He stood in the hall dripping pools all over the place. I had to wipe it up with cloths this morning."

"Thanks, that's just what I wanted. I'll go up to the office now and have a look round there. By the way, how tall is Frank?"

"Just under five foot nine," Jean said, staring. But Wilson offered no explanation.

## V

— Arrived at the colliery office, a gloomy place of blue-black brick, he found a fine excitement going on. Mr. Franks, it is true, was hidden in his inner room, and might spring out at any minute; but in whispers the affair was being fully discussed in all its bearings. Wilson stopped to listen to the gossip, and discovered that sympathy was very much with Franklin Grant, whom the office generally declared to have been badly treated by the manager. As for Franks himself, few had a good word to say for him. A skinflint and a nigger-driver, spiteful and a bully, were the mildest of epithets applied to him, and the office appeared to find considerable pleasure

in the fact that he had been the victim of the chloroform.

Wilson next proceeded to beard Franks himself, and to ask for a look at the damaged safe. The manager did not appear particularly willing, but he came out of the books, where he was gloatingly following up the trail of his cashier's misdemeanours, and gave permission.

Wilson looked round the room. The safe, very much battered, but still firmly closed, lay on its side. A blowpipe had been used to get through the first of its steel skins, but the chief damage had been done by a charge of dynamite which had ripped up the second skin and blocked the lock, without, however, penetrating the safe itself.

"Anything missing?" he asked.

"No."

"How did the thieves get in?"

"Through the window. You can see it's been forced."

Wilson went to the window and examined the catch, which had certainly been forced, and very neatly forced too. He opened it and leaned out, and suddenly his eye was caught by what looked like a footprint in the soft ground just at the foot of the wall and in the shelter of the wide eave. With a suppressed exclamation he let himself out of the window and bent down to examine it. Mr. Franks, looking up a minute or two later, saw to his surprise that his tiresome visitor had totally disappeared.

The aforesaid visitor, after having gazed his fill at the footprint and even gone the length of drawing

it in his notebook, made his way round again to the outer office, where he busied himself trying to find out whether anyone within the last week or so had seen any loiterers in the neighbourhood. For some time he drew a blank. until one clerk, who seemed more observant than the rest, at last recollected having been accosted by a tall man about ten days previously, who had asked him if there was a chance of getting work at the colliery. Three or four days later, he now remembered, he had seen the same man hanging about the office, and had then warned him off the premises. He had not seen him again.

"Tall, you say," Wilson said. "Do you know how tall?"

"About your size," the clerk said, measuring him with an eye. "Or maybe an inch or so taller."

"Anything more about him you remember."

The clerk tried hard, and eventually produced some sort of a description. The man, he said, was slim and loose-limbed, about thirty-five, clean-shaven, with rather rough fair hair showing under his cap, a long nose and wide mouth, and gray eyes with a cast in the left one. At the last item Wilson, who had been writing in his notebook, looked up with interest.

"You're sure of that?" he said. "In the *left* eye?" The clerk was sure, and added that it was a fairly pronounced cast; nobody could have missed it.

"Thank you," said Wilson, who appeared uncommonly pleased at the news, though all he did for the moment was to continue writing in his

notebook. After a little, however, he put it away, and started on a round of the addresses given him by Constable Hawkins, at the end of which, looking more pleased than ever, he treated himself to a hasty lunch, and then made his way to the police station.

"There's a code telegram for you here," Inspector Watling said as he entered.

"Thanks," said Wilson, tearing it open and glancing rapidly at the contents. A smile appeared on his face.

"Any news?"

For answer Wilson drew a paper from his pocket, added a few notes to it, and laid it on the inspector's desk.

"'Alfred Todd,' " the latter read in a perplexed tone, "'height six foot one, gray eyes, with strong cast in left . . .'" He waded through a complete list of Alfred Todd's peculiarities. "'Last seen at George and Dragon Inn, Bowden, at 10 a.m. on Friday morning, February 15th.'—what's all this about?"

"Only I should set your people after him quickly, if I were you," said Wilson calmly. "He's got your seven thousand pounds."

"What!" The inspector nearly jumped from his seat. "But how on earth——?"

"He purged the office on Thursday night," said Wilson, "and put the safe out of action. Then he probably followed Mr. Franks home on Friday—anyway he climbed in, stole the cash, and made off. If you inquire, I think you'll find he also tampered with the office telephone."

"Put, man alive," cried the inspector, "how do you know all this? And how on earth have you got his description so pat?"

"Oh, I remembered most of it," said Wilson. "The rest is here." He patted Blaikie's telegram. "I'd an idea it might have been him, and if Mr. Franks had been a little quicker in reporting burglaries we need not have had any trouble. As it is, I'm afraid a good few notes of his may have disappeared by the time we lay hands on Mr. Todd."

## VI

"What beats me," the inspector said, two or three days later, when Alfred Todd, cracksman and safe-breaker, had been successfully caught and lodged in Horden Jail, "is how you tumbled to it so quick that it wasn't Grant."

"Well, of course," Wilson admitted, "it might have been. But when I first heard the story, the chloroforming part seemed to me just a little bit too cool and elaborate for a young hand on his first job—particularly at a moment's notice, for you were all agreed he couldn't have had anything to do with the safe-cracking. That put another idea into my head.

"You were all making a great deal of Grant's being the only man who knew the safe was out of order. As I pointed out to you at the time, that wasn't true. Franks certainly knew, and if Grant hadn't done the damage, there was someone else who knew—the burglar himself. It occurred

to me that perhaps the burglar, having failed to open the safe, had decided to smash it up so that it couldn't be used, hoping that the money would be lodged somewhere less secure. When I looked at it later, I saw that this was exactly what had happened. There hadn't been any real attempt to *open* the thing, only a deliberate and very cunning putting of it out of action.

"Well, if my assumed burglar had also stolen the money, he obviously must have trailed Franks to find out what he did with it. I tried to find out if Franks had noticed anyone hanging about when he received it or took it home, but I drew blank. So I went off to his house, to look for traces of a swell cracksman. I'd already thought of Todd, because, as any C.I.D. man will tell you, he's one of the very few burglars who habitually use chloroform. And I knew he was at large.

"Franks's house told me several things. First, that both the climbing in and the forcing of the wardrobe lock had been done by a first-class hand—not by an amateur. Secondly, the step from the portico to the window sill was almost too much for me—and I'm a good three inches taller than Grant. I didn't lay much stress on that, because people can do strange things when they're desperate; but I also found a footprint of a rubber sole just by the portico and on the sill, which told me that the visitor had arrived after the rain. He had not been out in the rain, at least not for long, for though there was mud in the room from his shoes, there was not a trace of water having dripped from him.

Now the rain was hard and heavy ; Franklin Grant was out in all of it, without a coat, and came home absolutely dripping. It *could* not have been he who entered that bedroom at two in the morning or later. It was my pro. again.

"So I wired some inquiries about Todd's description and present whereabouts to the Yard, and went off to the office to see if I could pick up any more hints. There I was lucky. Not only did I find what looked very much like traces of Todd's work with a blowpipe, I also found half the same footprint in some soft ground which the eaves had sheltered from the rain, and, best of all, a clerk who remembered a man with Todd's squint hanging about in the neighbourhood some time previously. Well, if he'd been in the neighbourhood it was pretty likely he'd stayed there, so I hunted the available places till I found his trail at the George and Dragon, which he'd left, ostensibly on the Friday morning. Your fellows' organisation did the rest."

"It wouldn't have had much to do, though, if you hadn't come in first," the inspector said with a sigh, recollecting the somewhat uncomplimentary terms in which Mr. Todd, on capture, had expressed his view that if that — of a nark hadn't been hanging about those poor —s at the station would never have caught him. "But you'll admit it looked a bit suspicious against your nephew?"

"Oh, certainly," Wilson assured him heartily. "The young fool was exceedingly lucky not to have got a stretch in prison, and so I've told him. As a matter of fact, it may turn out for the best, after

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all. He's had fright enough to last him a lifetime, and now that that man from Horden who was so sympathetic with his position has offered him a job, I see no reason why he shouldn't keep straight."

"All's well that ends well, in fact," said the inspector, "except for the company. They won't see the money again that Todd managed to get rid of before he was caught."

"I'm not shedding any tears over the company," Wilson told him. "An organisation that employs Mr. Franks, and gives him *carte blanche* to sweat his clerks as much as he likes, should be able to look after itself—without any help from me."



## THE OXFORD MYSTERY

### I

MATTHEW KINGDON, Fellow of St. Philip's College, Oxford, was quite unable to settle down to prepare his paper for the Philosophical Society. "Do Relations Relate?" was a fascinating subject, and he had promised himself good sport in answering the question, and incidentally discomfiting his great rival, Dr. Mugsley of St. Jude's. But, try as he would, he could not settle down to think or write. His ideas were a meaningless jumble, and into them constantly intruded a thought quite alien to philosophical contemplation. He could not keep his mind off the murder.

And no wonder! For such an experience as Kingdon's does not often come the way of a cloistered university don. Maurice Austin, the most popular undergraduate in the college, and perhaps in the whole university, had been murdered, and one of his fellow students had been arrested and charged with the crime. Moreover, both the young men were Kingdon's pupils, and it had fallen to his lot both to discover the body and to provide an important link in the chain of evidence against the man suspected of murder. No wonder Kingdon felt in a most unphilosophical mood, the more distressing because his paper must positively reach the printers on the following day.

It had happened in this wise. Two days before, Kingdon had walked over to dine and spend the night with his friend, Lawrence of Trinity, who lived out at Old Marston, a village a couple of miles outside Oxford. On the following morning the two men had walked into Oxford together, to lecture in their respective colleges. They had started early and made a long detour along the bank of the Cherwell, the little stream which flows down past Marston Ferry to Oxford. They were talking hard about the argument Kingdon intended to put forward in his paper. About half a mile from the ferry, Kingdon noticed a punt which had run aground on a projecting tree. No pole was to be seen, but a paddle lay in the bottom. What drew Kingdon's attention was a suit of clothes lying in the boat, with a blazer on top bearing the arms of his own college. "One of our men taking an early bathe, I suppose," he remarked, pointing out the blazer to Lawrence. "Funny there's no sign of him."

They looked up and down the stream, but there was no sign of the bather. "I hope there's nothing wrong," said Kingdon.

"Perhaps you can find out who it is," Lawrence suggested. "Have a look at the clothes."

Kingdon climbed into the boat and lifted up the blazer. "It's Maurice Austin," he said.

"The Blue?" asked Lawrence.

"Yes, and my best pupil—bar one," said Kingdon. "The only better man I've got is his friend, Laj Russell, the man who's half Indian."

"It looks as if the boat has drifted down here,"

Lawrence said. "Your man may be farther upstream, shivering for his clothes. But it's odd we didn't see him. Anyway we'd better have another look."

Now, seriously worried, the two philosophers hunted upstream and downstream, but found nothing. At length they made their way back to the Ferry to summon help. Leaving the men from the Ferry to continue the search, they hurried on towards Oxford to fetch others and find out whether Austin was missing. Suddenly, they both caught sight of a white object washing about, tangled in some bushes by the edge of the stream. "What's that?" they exclaimed at the same moment.

It was young Austin's body. Both men at once recognised the upturned face of the young athlete and marked the staring eyes and the open mouth. The fair hair was draggled with mud and leaves, and the face was swollen and purple. "I never knew drowned men looked like that," said Lawrence.

Between them the two men dragged Austin's body up the bank. Then Lawrence ran back to summon the men from the Ferry, who were still searching where the boat had been found. Soon a little group gathered round. Lawrence went back to Marston to telephone to the police and the college authorities, while Kingdon stayed with the body.

When the police arrived, accompanied by a doctor, matters were taken out of Kingdon's hands. Dr. Martin proclaimed, after a brief examination of the body, that this was no case of drowning. The victim had been strangled by means of a fine cord

drawn tightly round his neck, whose marks were still plainly visible. The tragedy, then, was no mere boating accident, but a palpable and cold-blooded murder.

Kingdon led the police back to where the boat lay, and the sergeant at once began to gather up the dead man's clothes. Beneath lay something that shone. "Hullo, what's this?" he said, holding up a small gold charm. He handed it to Kingdon. "Looks like the sort of thing a man would wear on his watch chain. May be a valuable clue."

"Oh, I know this charm," said Kingdon. "It belongs to a man called Russell—a great friend of poor Austin's. He always wears it on his chain, as you suggest."

"H'm!" said the sergeant; and Kingdon felt a chill sensation as he realised the suspicion in the tone. He handed back the charm, and the sergeant carefully wrapped it up and put it away. "I shall want to know a bit more about this Russell," he said.

"He was Austin's closest friend," said Kingdon. But the sergeant replied only with another grunt.

When the police had finished their immediate search, Kingdon accompanied the body back to Oxford. From the police station the sergeant went with him to the college, where he questioned the porter closely about Russell. It appeared that he was known to have gone up the river with Austin on the previous afternoon and to have returned very late at night, alone. The porter said that his manner had been strange, and that he had supposed

him to be unwell. He had wondered if he was drunk, though he had never known him to be in such a condition. Asked where Russell was now, he reported, after sending for the scout who looked after the stair, that he had breakfasted early in his room and then gone out by himself. The scout, too, had thought his manner odd, and was sure something had occurred to upset him. Questioned by the sergeant, he produced some further information. On going into Russell's room the previous afternoon to clear away lunch he had found Austin with him. This was nothing uncommon, as the two were great friends. But what was unusual was that they had stopped talking suddenly on his entrance and had both looked very uncomfortable, almost as if they had been quarrelling. He had never known them quarrel before. Had he heard anything of what they were saying? He had caught only the words "I'd sooner die than let it come out," from young Austin, who had appeared to be deeply moved, and Russell's answer: "I wish to God I'd never known." Then Austin had walked over to the window and stood staring out silently until the servant had left the room. Soon afterwards, they had gone out together to go up the river, so that they could hardly, the man suggested, have been quarrelling seriously.

The sergeant, having elicited these particulars, and set on foot a search for Russell, of whom there was still no sign, returned to Marston to resume his inquiries there. He found, as Kingdon learned later, that Austin and Russell had been seen together in their boat at Marston Ferry. They had supped on

bread and cheese and beer at the inn, and Austin had been heard declaring his intention of bathing on the way back, while Russell had said that the water would be too cold. They had left the inn at about nine o'clock, and thereafter nothing had ~~been~~ seen of them.

This was the position when, just before lunch, Russell came back to the college, and was told by the porter that the police had been inquiring after him. He expressed no surprise and asked no questions, but went straight to his rooms, only to find the police sergeant in occupation, busy searching among his clothes and papers. Kingdon hurried to his rooms at once on hearing of his return, and came in just as the sergeant was in the midst of a searching examination, which made the nature of his suspicions abundantly plain. Kingdon could see that his pupil was on the verge of collapse. The sergeant turned to him. "I hope, Mr. Kingdon, you will manage to persuade Mr. Russell that, if he is innocent in this affair, his clear duty is to tell us everything he knows about it."

"Of course, if he knows anything, he will tell you," said Kingdon. "What is it you want to know?"

The sergeant said that he wanted to know everything, but especially when, and under what circumstances, Russell had parted from young Austin the day before. But to Kingdon's intense surprise, Russell absolutely refused to answer any questions whatever. "Please, Mr. Kingdon," he said, "I'd much rather not say anything at all. Of course I

didn't kill Maurice, though I can see the sergeant believes I did. But I'm not going to say anything about it. I'm sorry ; but that's definite."

Kingdon, taken quite aback, tried to reason with the young man, but was unable to move him. He urged that silence would inevitably bring suspicion upon him, told Russell that he believed in his innocence, and that he need feel no fear if he would only tell the truth. His arguments made no impression ; Russell would give no information at all. The exasperated sergeant tried bullying, with no better result, and at last began to hint at arrest if he would not speak. Nothing moved Russell. He merely replied that he was very sorry, but he had nothing to say.

Kingdon was fond of his pupil, and sincerely worried by his attitude. He could not believe that Russell was guilty of murdering his friend ; but he did not know how to explain his silence. When the sergeant, after warning the suspect not to attempt to go away, had at last departed without carrying out his threat to arrest him, Kingdon strongly urged Russell to employ a lawyer. The answer was a polite refusal, and a renewed attempt to win the young man's confidence met with no success. Kingdon insisted on sending his own lawyer all the same ; but when he arrived, Russell merely refused to talk, saying that there was nothing to be done, and he wanted only to be let alone.

Next day, the inquest was held on young Austin's body. Kingdon found the little court crowded ; for, of course, the case had made a great sensation in

the city. Opinion seemed on the whole to be strongly against Russell, though there were some in his own college who took an opposite view. Russell was a quiet fellow, well liked in his small circle, but not well known even in his own college, and almost unknown outside. On the other hand, Maurice Austin had been known and liked by every one ; for despite his cricket blue and his presidency of the Union, he put on no " side," and enjoyed his popularity without trading on it.

After the evidence about the finding of the boat and the body, in the course of which Kingdon had to testify to the finding of Russell's charm beneath the dead man's clothes, Russell himself was put into the witness box. He said that he had gone up the river, on the day before the body was found, with Austin, and had supped with him at Marston Ferry. A little below the Ferry he had got out of the boat, and gone off by himself for a long walk. He supposed he had dropped the charm before leaving the boat. Neither he nor Austin had bathed ; but he believed Austin intended to do so after his departure. They were close friends and had parted on perfectly friendly terms. Asked why he had gone off by himself for a long walk, and returned late to college, Russell said that he often did take long walks by himself in the evening, and that several friends would be able to confirm this. Confronted with the positive evidence that he had come back in an exhausted condition and had seemed very ill, he admitted that he had felt unwell, but denied that anything had occurred to upset him. He had only



overtired himself walking and come over faint. Russell's statement ended with a passionate assertion of his innocence, and of his strong affection for the friend he knew he was suspected of murdering. There was a murmur of divided sympathies in the court as he sat down.

This ended the official evidence ; but at this point a man rose in the body of the court and said that he wished to be heard. He was duly sworn, giving his name as James Mason, labourer, of New Marston. He declared that, on the night of the crime, he had been working in his allotment not far from the place where the boat was discovered. He had seen a punt, with two men in it, coming down the stream. The first man was a "nigger," whom he was prepared positively to identify as the gentleman who had just given evidence, and his description of the other made it clear that it was Maurice Austin. They had probably not seen him, as there was a hedge between, through which he had looked at the boat. A little later, he had gathered up his tools and started home. As he passed the boat, there was only one man in it—the fair one. This man was taking off his clothes, in evident preparation for a swim. Mason had passed on by the fields on the opposite side of the river to that on which the punt was moored. A hundred yards or so farther along, he had seen a second man, coming towards the boat on the other side of the stream. And this man, he declared, was Laj Russell. Naturally he had suspected no harm, and had gone home without thinking any more of the incident. Only when he

saw in the paper an account of the finding of the body did it occur to him that he had witnessed anything of importance. He had come to court prepared to offer his testimony.

All this is much easier to write down than it was to extract from the witness, who was rather slow of speech and comprehension. But Mason's story was quite clear, and questioning added only one fresh point. The man he had seen approaching the boat would have been invisible to Austin, for there was a thick clump of bushes in between, and the punt was moored just under these—about thirty yards higher upstream than the place where it had been found. Mason could not positively identify the man he had seen, either in the boat or later walking towards it. But he was certain that it was the same man he saw on both occasions, and, if it was not Russell, it was someone very like him, and of his build and complexion. Russell, recalled, denied that he had returned to the boat after leaving it.

After a fairly close questioning, which caused Mason to seem surer of his identification, the coroner summed up. He was obviously guarded, but inclined against Russell; and his jury, after taking some time to deliberate, brought in a verdict that Maurice Austin had met his death by murder at the hands of Laj Russell, undergraduate, of St. Philip's College. Within a few minutes, the newsboys were crying the verdict up and down the streets. Russell was arrested at the end of the proceedings. Kingdon got a word with him before his removal to the cells;

but his pupil only reasserted his innocence and entreated his tutor to believe him.

In the senior, as well as the junior, common room that night, the murder was the sole topic of conversation. Among the undergraduates there was a small but influential section who believed in Russell's innocence. Most of the dons took the opposite view, and Kingdon, who still firmly believed in his pupil, found only one supporter in his common room. That was the cynical Professor of Mathematics, and as he was reputed always to side with the minority, none were surprised at his attitude. But the two received influential support ; for the Master of the college, who looked in for a few minutes, proved to be strongly on their side. Mutual sympathy drew the three men together, and they walked away from the common room still talking about the case.

" I feel we ought to do something for the poor fellow," said Kingdon ; " about his defence, I mean. I understand he has no relative living." The Master remained thoughtful for a moment. Then he turned to Kingdon. " I believe," he said, " I am the only man in college who knows about young Russell—unless poor Austin knew—and I don't know whether I ought to tell. Come up to my room, and I'll put the case before you, and we can decide whether I ought to make it public."

When they were settled in the Master's comfortable study, lined everywhere with books, he began very seriously. " Of course, I am telling you this in strict confidence, as it was told to me. Russell and poor Austin were half-brothers. No, let

me finish. Laj Russell is the son of Sir Matthew Austin by his first 'wife'—an Indian woman. It was, I understand, not—er—a regular marriage. Laj Russell was born shortly before Sir Matthew's marriage to Lady Austin. When Sir Matthew and his—er—first wife parted, he agreed to look after the boy. The woman died shortly afterwards. Maurice Austin was the only child of his regular marriage. The older boy was known as Laj Russell, and his parentage was not disclosed, even to him, and I don't think he knows even now, though, of course, I can't be sure. He was sent by his father to a good school in India, and then to a native university there. Three years ago Sir Matthew came to see me. He had, of course, left India for good by then. His son, Maurice, was just coming into residence with a scholarship here. Sir Matthew had conceived the curious idea of giving his two sons the opportunity to become friends, without either knowing the blood relationship between them. He told me his whole story, and asked me to accept young Russell as a pupil and keep an eye on him. Finally I agreed—I can't say I thought it was in the best of taste, but that was no business of mine—and Russell was brought over from India and came into residence in the same term as his half-brother. Sir Matthew came up himself and introduced Russell to Maurice Austin as a protégé of his, and the son of an old friend in India. As you know, the two became fast friends, rather to my surprise, for they were not at all of the same type.

"Lady Austin was dead before then, and Sir  
S.W.H. G

Matthew died a year later. He had made some provision for his protégé before his death, letting the boy believe that he was handing over to him the money of a mythical Russell senior who had died in India. But, of course, Maurice Austin was to come in for the great bulk of his property, which, as you know, is considerable, as soon as he was of age. The poor lad would have been very well off indeed, as compared with young Russell. Now, you see my difficulty. If I make these facts public, I'm almost sure it will prejudice people against Russell, and they will scent a family squabble. On the other hand, I'm not sure I have any right to keep them to myself. What do you say?"

It was Wintringham, the Professor of Mathematics, who answered: "Keep it to yourself, Master, for the present at least. And I have another word of advice to offer. There's more in this case than meets the eye. You ought to put the finest detective you can get on the job and give him a free hand."

"What do you say, Kingdon?" asked the Master.

"I agree," said Kingdon; "what you have told us makes expert advice absolutely essential. Had you anyone in mind, Wintringham?"

"I had a man I used to know as a boy. You must have heard of him. He was superintendent at the C.I.D. till he retired unexpectedly a couple of years ago. Now he's set up a private agency, only for the best class of work. He picks and chooses; but I think he would take this on if I asked him. name's Wilson."

"Of course I have heard of Mr. Wilson," said the Master. "What about you, Kingdon?"

"Not in my line," said Kingdon. "But let's have him, if he's a good man. I'll share in the cost."

"What about Russell himself? What's his view?"

"I don't understand him," Kingdon looked as puzzled as he felt. "He absolutely refuses to employ even a lawyer. He says he wishes no steps taken about the case. That, of course, is what set the police against him at the start."

"And that," said Wintringham with a gleam in his eye, "makes me all the more determined to go ahead. I am not accustomed to having my opinions laid down for me by the police."

### III

So it was settled, and on the following day Kingdon, as the most leisured of the three, went up to town in order to interview the famous detective. A trunk call by Wintringham had already enlisted his sympathetic interest in the case. Kingdon found Wilson in his office in Charing Cross, a pleasant room with a fine view over St. James's Park. He liked the detective from the first. Wilson settled himself and his visitor in two comfortable arm-chairs, filled his pipe and passed Kingdon the tobacco-jar, and composed himself to listen. He had read, he explained, the newspaper accounts of the case; but they were very meagre, and he wanted the whole story from Kingdon's own lips. Only when he had

heard all the facts could he decide for or against taking up the case.

Kingdon told the story, and Wilson interrupted him with a number of questions. When he explained how the charm from Russell's watch-chain had been found under Austin's clothes in the abandoned punt, Wilson raised two points.

"How were the clothes lying?" he asked. "Folded up or just thrown down in a heap?"

"Just thrown down, as they would naturally be left by a man who had undressed for a bathe. The blazer was lying beside, and not actually on top of, the rest."

"You say the charm was underneath the blazer. Was it lying so that the blazer must have been put down on top of it, or could it have rolled to where it lay after the blazer was laid down?"

Kingdon reflected. "It could have rolled," he said. "The blazer was resting on the thwart, and the charm could have fallen under it."

"You see the importance of the point?" Kingdon replied that he did not.

"Well, if the blazer had been put down on top of the charm, it would be most likely that Russell dropped it before leaving the boat, and before Austin undressed. As that need not have been the case, its position tells us nothing. It may have fallen there either before or after the blazer was put down. It is rather more likely it was after, as that would account for it not being noticed."

"Then that makes against Russell."

"As far as it goes, yes. Another point. Was

the charm, or the ring which joined it to the chain, wrenched or damaged in any way ? ”

“ The ring looked as if it might have been wrenched open. The charm was quite intact. ”

“ Was young Russell wearing the watch and chain afterwards ? ”

Kingdon did not know, and Wilson said he would have to look into that point later. Kingdon noted with satisfaction that he was speaking already as if he had definitely decided to take the case. He was, at least, clearly interested.

Wilson's next interruption was when Kingdon described the finding of the body. “ You know that stretch of river well, do you not ? I want you to visualise the three places—where you found the body, where you found the punt, and where the witness, Mason, said he last saw the boat. Could the boat and the body easily have drifted from where Mason saw them to where you found them ? ”

Kingdon paused again to think. “ Yes, quite easily,” he said.

“ Then we may assume for the present that the scene of the tragedy was the place where Mason saw Austin undressing in the boat. Is that the spot where Russell says he left the boat ? ”

“ Yes, the same spot. ”

“ Clearly he did leave it, for there was only one man in the boat when Mason saw it for the second time. But Mason says he saw a man like Russell returning, whereas Russell denies that he did return. You say the boat was moored just under some bushes ? ”



"Mason says so. I only saw it when it had drifted lower down."

"But you know the bushes? They were tall enough and thick enough, were they, to make a man approaching along the path by the river invisible from the boat?"

"Quite."

"Or to conceal a man standing on the bank within a few feet of the boat?"

"Yes."

"Now, as for this Laj Russell, what sort of a fellow is he? I understand he is a favourite of yours?"

"He is a very able man, and I have always liked him and thought him a very good, straightforward young fellow. He is quiet and does not make friends easily; but he is popular with the few he knows well. By temperament he is a student—a man certain to make his mark in philosophy, if he goes on with it."

"In appearance, is he more Indian than English?"

"More English, I should say. But he is rather dark-skinned, and anyone can see he has Indian blood."

"Mason, I believe, saw him only at a distance; but he described him as a 'nigger.' Is that a natural description in your view?"

"Of course I should not so describe him; but, coming from a man like Mason, the description did not surprise me."

"Is he dark enough, then, for his colour to show at a distance?"

Again Kingdon thought. "I don't know," he said. "I should have thought, on the whole, not; but I'm not sure, and, of course, it depends on the distance."

"I must see for myself," said Wilson.

"There are police court proceedings to-morrow," said Kingdon. "You could see him then. But it will be only a formal committal, I understand."

"Now, about the young fellow's antecedents," said Wilson, "You have told me all you know? Your Master believed both Russell and Austin to be quite ignorant of their relationship?"

"Certainly; though, of course, one never knows how things will leak out."

"The two were close friends, you say. How close?"

"Very close indeed. They lunched regularly together in college and were often about together. I took them together for private tuition, and could see how friendly they were."

"Then it seems to you most unlikely that Russell could have killed young Austin?"

"Absolutely impossible, I should say, from what I know of the two men."

"Thank you, Mr. Kingdon. I think that is everything. I will take the case, and I will be in Oxford to-morrow in time for the police court proceedings. Can you meet me at the station?"

"Yes, there is a train gets in at about eleven o'clock, and the court opens at half-past. We can go straight there. Will you stay with me in college? I am very glad indeed you will take the case."

Wilson accepted the invitation. He liked Kingdon, and residence in college would enable him to find out best all that was known about Russell and the dead man. Kingdon returned to Oxford that night, highly pleased with his reception and impressed by Wilson's handling of the case.

He met Wilson at the station the next morning, and they attended the police court together. The proceedings were purely formal, and lasted only a few minutes. Russell was remanded for a week, for the police were still looking for further evidence in order to build up a conclusive case. But the brief proceedings gave Wilson time to have a good look at the man who was accused. He had stationed himself as far as possible off the prisoner in order to get the view at a distance that he wanted. His eyes were keen, but he felt fairly sure that he would not have known at that distance that Russell was not a pure-blooded Englishman, and certain that it would not have entered into his head to describe him as a "nigger." As they left the court, he told Kingdon his immediate plans. "I want to have a look at the place where the murder was done," he said, "and I want to see Mason. But, first of all, I want you to find out about Russell's watch and chain. If I ask the police, they will know I am on the case. If you ask the inspector, he'll very likely tell you without any trouble."

Kingdon turned back into the court, and Wilson waited until he reappeared, saying that the watch and chain had not been found. "But," he added, "I've remembered something that I ought to have

thought of before. While I was talking to the inspector, a view of young Russell's coat came into my mind's eye. There was a tear in the button-hole on the left lapel, as if something had been wrenched away. He was wearing no waistcoat, and I know he used to carry his watch in his outside breast-pocket."

"There's something odd here," said Wilson. "That, and the wrenched ring of the charm make it clear that your friend has not told the whole truth. There must have been a struggle, in the course of which his watch and chain were wrenched away and the charm fell off into the boat."

Kingdon would have liked to reject this view, but he could not. "You don't mean that you think he did it?" he asked.

"I am only stating an obvious fact that will certainly be used against him," was the reply. "I am not drawing any conclusions yet. And now, let's get to work."

#### . IV

They took a taxi to New Marsdon and, inquiring at the house where Mason lodged, were told where they would be likely to find him working in the fields. He was just knocking off for his midday meal when they discovered him, and willing enough to talk about the case.

"You say you are pretty sure," said Wilson, "that young Russell is the man you saw."

Mason said he was quite certain.

"On both occasions," Wilson went on.

"Don't I tell you 'twas the same chap I seen both times?"

"What surprised me," said Wilson, "was your seeing the man, was a 'nigger,' as you call him. How far off were you from him?"

"First time, 'bout as far as across this field," said Mason, indicating a distance of about sixty yards.

"And the second time?"

"A lot nearer, mister. About twenty yards, I should reckon."

"Yet you knew he was a 'nigger' the first time you saw him?"

"See here, mister, what are you gettin' at? Ain't I saying he was a nigger, and ain't he a bloomin' nigger? What more d'ye want?"

"Oh, it's of no importance," said Wilson. "Only I thought you must be extraordinarily long-sighted, like me. Now, you see that girl over there. Can you see the colour of the blouse she's wearing?"

"Looks like white to me."

"It isn't, though, it's fawn. You're not so long-sighted as I am."

"See here," said Mason, "you tell me straight what you're driving at. I don't want to do nobody no harm. What is it you want to know?"

"Whether you positively knew the man was a nigger the first time you saw him, or only on the second occasion."

Mason scratched his head. "If you put it that

way, mister, I don't believe I ~~hid~~ see he was a nigger till the second time. But I saw him then all right. What's it matter anyhow?"

"Suppose you saw two different men."

"But I didn't! 'Twas the same man. They were dressed alike, an'——"

"How were they dressed?"

"Darkish gray suit. But that ain't all. When I first saw the chap, he was sitting down in the boat. While I was watching, he stood up, and I noticed the way he did it. I dunno quite how to put it. Like an animal, it was, somehow. And then, when I saw him again, before he began walking towards the boat, he was lyin' down just near the edge of the river, and I saw him get up just the same way as I'd seen him before. That's how I'm certain sure he was the same chap."

"You didn't mention this in court."

"I warn't asked. But that's how it was."

"I see. How near to the boat was he when you last saw him?"

"Just goin' be'ind the clump of bushes or trees where the boat was. He was sliding along like as if he didn't want to be seen."

"Did he see you?"

"I don't think so, mister. I'd stopped still, fillin' my pipe, and the bushes might have 'id me, unless he'd looked special my way."

"So far, so good," said Wilson, when they had left Mason. "And now for a look at the place." He only glanced at the place where the boat had been found, and then hurried on to the spot where

it had been moored when Mason had seen it for the second time. On the bank, a circle of small bushes and small trees ringed the place round. A projecting tree offered a convenient branch for tying up a punt, and the mud bank shelved steeply towards the deeper water. If a punt was moored there, it could be drawn right into the bank, and the water on the shore side would be only a few inches deep, whereas, on the other side of the punt a swimmer would be well out of his depth. The bushes came right down to the edge of the water and would overhang the punt, and, as Wilson ascertained, might actually mask half of it from a man in the water at a distance of a few feet, if he swam towards it up the stream or directly across. From the opposite bank a few yards up, however, the whole of the boat would be plainly visible, and it was from this point, Kingdon explained, that Mason had seen Austin alone in the boat undressing for a bathe.

"Now for a little dirty work," said Wilson, when he had surveyed the spot. "It's only a chance, but it's worth taking. Is there a house near where we can borrow a spade?"

Kingdon knew of a cottage near, and soon returned with a spade and a broad shovel. "We're going to dig up this mud by the bush," said Wilson.

The two men gradually dug out the loose mud along the bank just where the punt had been. For a considerable time Wilson's sifting and turning produced nothing except a number of old tin cans. Then he found the top of a fountain pen. "Most likely nothing to do with our man," he commented.

At last patience was rewarded. From a shovelful of mud Kingdon extracted a watch and chain. "Is this what you were looking for?" he asked.

"Yes," said Wilson, "but I hardly expected to find it. And it doesn't carry us a great deal further. Clearly there was a struggle and the watch and chain were torn off Russell's coat. The charm was detached and fell in the boat, whereas the watch and chain fell in the river. I thought that might have happened. Give me the watch.

"It stopped at nine forty-five," he said, "when it fell into the water. That fixes, within a few minutes, the hour of the struggle. When did Mason see his man the second time—I mean walking towards the boat?"

"He said it was before half-past nine. He wasn't sure to a few minutes."

"We'll go back to where you found the body," said Wilson.

He stood for a full minute contemplating the spot. "How was the body lying?" he asked. Kingdon showed him.

"When you found it, were there any footmarks near or anything to indicate that anybody had been there before you?"

Kingdon looked at him in surprise. "I'm afraid I never looked," he said.

"Perhaps the police did," said Wilson. "If so, it will be a very material fact for us. And I think they did, for I perceive that someone has been taking plaster casts here." He picked up a fragment of plaster as he spoke. "Unfortunately, there are



no marks left now. We can only hope the police did their work properly. Now, will you take me to the inn at the ferry where Russell and Austin had supper ? ”

At the inn, Wilson questioned the landlord and his daughter, who had served the two young men, and subsequently took Kingdon to pay a round of calls at neighbouring cottages. Of all he asked the same question. Had they seen either of the undergraduates, or any man at all like either of them, in the neighbourhood of Marston that evening ? And, if they had not, would they inquire among their neighbours for anyone who had ? There would be a reward for anyone bringing the required information. To the first question, each man replied in the negative, to the second, by promising to make inquiries. Wilson and Kingdon walked back to Oxford in time for dinner. They had done all there was to do on the scene of the crime.

Wilson dined in hall that night, at high table, but he did not reveal the work on which he was engaged, posing merely as a friend of Kingdon's, and saying nothing of his identity. He found opinion, under the influence of Kingdon's sturdy championship, veering round in Russell's favour. But little Aspinall, the lecturer in ancient history, was strong against him. These half breeds, he said, were nearly always moral degenerates. And though the Professor of Ethnology contradicted this, he too thought Russell was guilty.

After hall, Kingdon took Wilson to have a talk with the porter. Wilson asked if anyone from

outside the college had been to see Russell at any time shortly before the murder. The porter had noticed no one; but he promised to make inquiries among the other servants. This resulted in bringing some further information to light. The boy who assisted the scout on Russell's staff said that about one o'clock in the morning before the crime, he had been in his pantry, and had heard voices proceeding from Russell's room. One of them had been Russell's own and the other a curious high-pitched voice that might have been either a man's or a woman's. He had not caught any words, for the conversation had been conducted in some foreign language he did not understand; but he was sure Russell and his visitor had been quarrelling. He had not seen the visitor either come or go. Wilson went back to the porter and inquired whether any Indian or other foreigner, with a curious high voice, was known to have been in college on the morning preceding the murder. He got his answer. One of the under-porters, a new man who had come on duty that day for the first time, had directed an Indian, whose high voice he had noticed, to Laj Russell's rooms shortly before noon. Asked to describe the man, he gave a description that might have applied to almost any Indian. Neither the under-porter nor anyone else Wilson could find had seen the stranger leave the college. But, on his entrance, he had glanced down the list of names and rooms which hung in the porter's lodge.

"The scent is getting warm," said Wilson, as they left the lodge. "We have now to find an Indian

who speaks in a high voice and called on Austin and then on Russell the day before the crime. Who was he? That is the puzzle. What do you make of it?"

"I'm afraid I can make nothing of it."

"Will you take me to see the Master?" said Wilson.

In the Master's room, after the formalities of introduction were over, Wilson put the question he had wished to ask. "You know young Russell's history, Master. Do you know of a young Indian having a connection with both him and Austin?" The Master shook his head. "I suppose," Wilson went on, "Sir Matthew had no other children?"

"I never heard of any. Why do you ask?"

Wilson then asked if the Master knew who would get young Austin's money.

"That," was the reply, "I do happen to know. The money was left absolutely to Maurice Austin at twenty-one but, if he died before coming of age, it would go to the next of kin." A further question elicited the fact that the dead youth was still some months short of coming of age. "Who is the next of kin?" Wilson asked.

"A cousin, I believe; poor Russell being, as you know, illegitimate. The cousin is Dr. Brian Hendry, of the Indian Medical Service. He is in India at present, I believe."

"What sort of man is he?"

"A middle-aged man—a great authority on certain Asiatic diseases."

"And you are certain there is no nearer relation?"

"I understand so. Why do you ask?"

"Only because it would explain a lot if there were." Wilson seemed to be worried. "Who is the family lawyer?" he asked at length.

"Hirst and Trumble, of Lincoln's Inn, are the firm. Old Hirst was a great friend of Sir Matthew's. But he is dead."

"Then that," said Wilson, "is where I must go next. When is the next train?"

Before Wilson left Oxford, he secured a recent photograph of Laj Russell from one of his college friends. On arriving in London, he went straight to the offices of Messrs. Hirst and Trumble, and had a long talk with the senior partner. Thence he went to the office of the *Daily Courier* and was closeted for some time with the editor. Finally he visited Scotland Yard to see his old colleague, Inspector Blaikie, with whom he had made an appointment from Oxford over the telephone.

When he met Kingdon the next morning, he found the latter in a high state of agitation, waving a copy of the *Daily Courier*. "Have you seen this?" he gasped. On the middle page were two photographs, one of Laj Russell, labelled "The Accused," and the other, beside it, of an Indian closely resembling him, but much darker in complexion, labelled "The Man the Police are Looking For." Below the two photographs a few lines of type indicated that the "Oxford Mystery" was now

generally supposed to be a case of mistaken identity, and that the suspected criminal was the second man, who could be proved to have been on the spot, and was believed to be trying to leave the country. Readers of the *Courier* were warned to keep a sharp look-out for him, and to notify Scotland Yard instantly on coming across any traces.

Wilson took the paper with a smile. "Oh yes," he said, "In fact, I'm responsible."

"B-b-but," Kingdon stuttered in his astonishment, "how did you find out about the other man? I didn't know you knew what he looked like."

"I didn't," Wilson said. "And strictly speaking, I don't. He is what you might call a 'synthetic man'—composed with the aid of Messrs. Hirst and Trumble. But, if you will accompany me to the police station, and to our prisoner, I should like to try his effect on the people most concerned."

Bewildered, but obedient, Kingdon accompanied him to the Oxford police station, where Wilson, producing an authorisation from Scotland Yard, asked to see the plaster casts of the footprints found on the scene of the crime.

"How did you know?" said the surprised inspector in charge.

"You shouldn't leave plaster lying about if you don't want me to know," Wilson answered.

The inspector laughed and produced his exhibits. At the spot where the body had been found, the police had discovered a number of prints. Some of these proved to be those of Kingdon and Lawrence, or at least to tally with the sizes of their boots,

which the inspector and Wilson had both taken the precaution to obtain. The others were considerably smaller, and tallied exactly, the inspector said, with the shoes which Laj Russell had been wearing.

"And now," said Wilson, "what about the prints of the other man?"

"There were no others at this spot," said the inspector.

"No," said Wilson, "I mean the man who was seen walking towards the boat, and who then stood just behind the bushes where the boat was moored."

"But that was Russell," said the inspector. "We haven't any certain prints of him from there. . . ." He paused . . . "How did you know he stood behind the bushes?"

"I guessed," said Wilson. "I'm glad you confirm it. Show me what prints you have."

Rather reluctantly, the inspector produced four casts—three of the left foot, one a good deal deeper than the others, and one deep impression of the right foot. Wilson picked out the two deep casts. "Here he is, standing behind the bushes," he said.

"The others came from soft places in the path leading towards the bushes," said the inspector. "These are all the impressions that were any use."

"These are quite enough," Wilson answered. "You can see at once that they are not Russell's." "They're the same size," said the inspector.

"Yes, but not the same pair of shoes. Look at that broken place in the left heel, and the quite different arrangement of the nails."

"They're poor impressions," said the inspector.

"It's as plain as a pikestaff they're not the same," said Wilson.

Outside the police station he paused for a minute. "I think," he said, "we'll try Marston first, before seeing young Russell again. I want my case to be as complete as possible before interviewing that very uncommunicative young man. Now can you tell me whether there is any other way to Marston besides the road?"

Kingdon indicated that there were three—one across the University Parks, one through New Marston, and the third by the Ferry a couple of miles upstream. "We'll try New Marston," said Wilson. "You see," he added, as they made their way along Mesopotamia—the path between two streams which leads by a bridge to New Marston—"if the murderer visited both Russell and Austin in their rooms, it's quite possible that he may have discovered their plans for the evening and reached the rendezvous independently. In which case we may come upon his traces in some way which will exonerate his—young Russell."

After patient inquiry, he secured what he wanted. A woman living in one of the cottages at New Marston had seen a man answering to Wilson's description of the murderer coming up the path that led from Oxford and turning off in the direction of Old Marston. This was well before nine o'clock; when Austin and Russell were still at their supper in the inn. The woman had, of course, heard of the crime but had had no reason to connect this particular man with it. When questioned, however,

she produced her husband as confirmation, who was equally definite, both as to the time of the stranger's passing and as to his being a "nigger."

"'Nigger,' again, you see, Kingdon," said Wilson. "And yet that path turns off a good fifty yards below the cottage. Our man was obviously much darker than young Russell."

"But very like him to look at," Kingdon puzzled. "Who can he be?"

"Well, there are various possibilities," Wilson said. "Perhaps Russell himself will now be willing to enlighten us. I think we'll visit him before trying to find where the unknown stayed in Oxford."

They returned to the city, where Wilson directed his steps straight to the gaol in the New Road and asked to see the prisoner. After some delay Russell was brought to them, and Kingdon introduced Wilson as a friend interested in the case.

"I don't want to talk about it, sir," was all Russell said. He had obviously not slept, and seemed near the end of his tether.

"I only want you to look at this, Mr. Russell," Wilson said, handing over the *Courier*. Russell stared at it, and then looked up with an expression in which amazement predominated.

"But . . ." he said at last. "Those are both photographs of me—though that's a bad print"—indicating the darker one.

"Strictly speaking," said Wilson, while Kingdon stared at him, "you are quite correct. The second one has been artificially darkened. But, Mr. Russell"—his voice became suddenly more serious—



"would it not serve equally well as a portrait of your brother?"

"My brother!"

"The man who came to see you and Austin in your rooms before the murder, who walked over to Marston while you were at supper, who watched your parting from Austin behind the bushes—you see," he said to the young man, who had passed his hand over his eyes with a cry of horror and amazement, "it's no use, and you are only putting yourself to unnecessary discomfort by keeping silence. You cannot help your brother any more by incriminating yourself. Sit down and let's talk it over quietly." He pushed a chair forward, and Russell dropped into it and sank his head in his hands. There was a long pause. "Have they arrested—Chandra?" the young man whispered at last.

"Not as far as I know. But it makes no difference," Wilson insisted. "We know, as well as you, that he killed Maurice Austin. You cannot sacrifice yourself for him, however hard you try. Nor can you"—he looked hard at him—"save your father's

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"It wasn't my father," Russell said faintly. "It was Maurice."

"But Maurice is dead," Wilson said gently, "and nothing you say can hurt him. Won't you tell me? rather than have it dragged out piecemeal in court?" There was another long pause.

"What is it you want to know?" Russell said at last.

"What were the papers?" Wilson asked, "which

Chandra showed you when he came to your rooms the day before Austin died ? ”

“ Our birth certificates—his and mine,” Russell said in a very low voice, “ and a copy of my mother’s marriage certificate.”

“ Showing that you twins were, in fact, Sir Matthew’s legitimate children ? ”

“ Worse than that,” Russell muttered.

“ Yes, I know. That your mother did not, in fact, die soon after your birth, as Sir Matthew and everyone else thought, but survived after his remarriage. That,” Wilson added to Kingdon, “ I discovered from a paper in the possession of Hirst and Trumble, and it was that which put me on the true trail. So that,” he resumed, “ it was Maurice Austin—your friend—who was the bastard, and one of you—which ?—who was the legitimate heir.”

“ Chandra,” said Russell. “ That was the difficulty, you see. If it had been me, I would have gone away—I could have said nothing, and Maurice need never have known. But it was Chandra—and he expected me to help him—against Maurice. I didn’t know what to do . . . I told him to go away.”

“ You knew nothing of this story before, then ? ”

“ I had no idea,” Russell said earnestly. He had obviously resigned himself to full explanation. “ I did not even know who my father was. At first I thought Chandra was lying. Then—I got very angry, and sent him away. But when he’d gone, I saw I had been a fool. Of course, he would tell everyone, bring a lawsuit or something, and that

would be worse than anything. He might even go to Maurice. So I went after him—to his hotel—and told him I must think it over, and discuss it with—Maurice, and see what was best to be done. I explained that the money didn't belong to him in any case, because our father had left it to Maurice by will; but he laughed, and said that Maurice could easily spare us an income in return for keeping our mouths shut."

"He and you were to blackmail Austin, in fact?" Wilson said.

"Yes . . . I suppose that is what it is. I didn't know what to do—I felt I must have time to think it over. At last I persuaded him to wait till next day—till I'd had time to talk to Maurice—he was out of Oxford that day. I said I'd meet Chandra after supper next day when we got back."

"You told him where you were going with Austin?" Wilson asked.

"Yes, sir. I never thought . . ." It was plain that Russell had fully realised the result of that piece of information.

"Then I had to tell Maurice when he came back. He was . . . very angry and frightened, I think. Of course it was terrible for him. First he wanted to lock Chandra up . . . and then to hush it up—to offer Chandra money, as much as he liked, to go away. I thought that would be unwise, and we had rather an argument about it.

"Then I had to go to see you, sir"—he looked pitifully at Kingdon—"and while I was away Maurice suddenly changed his mind. I mean, he

saw my side of it, and he turned right round—he was like that, you know, when he'd been angry. And he wrote a letter to Chandra, telling him that he didn't care twopence what he did; he could tell the whole story if he liked, and he—Maurice, I mean—wouldn't have anything to do with it or him. When we were up the river Maurice told me about his letter, and said I must say the same to Chandra when I met him. . . . It was—just like Maurice; but I knew Chandra would be furious, so I went off quickly to keep my appointment with him."

"But you turned back?" Wilson said.

"Yes. I happened to look back and I saw somebody hiding—in the bushes, near where Maurice was in the water. I thought he looked as though he were going to take Maurice's clothes, so I went back. When I got there he was in the boat, and I saw . . ." He stopped with a choke, obviously unable to finish.

"You saw your brother strangle Austin," Wilson said gently. Russell nodded. "Then you flung yourself on him, and he let the body go. The two of you struggled to the boat, and your watch and chain were torn away. Then your brother got himself free and ran off. You paddled the punt till you got hold of Austin's body—but he was dead. Then what did you do?"

"I couldn't believe . . ." Russell said. "I think I went mad. I went after Chandra."

"But you could not find him. You searched as long as you could, and then returned to college. Next day you continued the search; but he was

nowhere, and when you returned you found the police on your track. You kept silence, partly in order to shield your brother—

"I didn't want to say—about Maurice."

"And because you thought no one would believe you. But, you see," Wilson crossed the room and put his hand on the young man's shoulder, "Mr. Kingdon believed you even without your story. And with a little good fortune we have been able to confirm it at every point. Now we will get you out of this place as quickly as possible; and may I congratulate you on a very gallant attitude?"

"Chandra . . . if Chandra's caught . . ." was all Russell said as his two friends left the room.

"Poor lad," said Wilson, coming out into Carfax. "He's had too big a shock to recover from just yet. It was the greatest misfortune he tried to handle that young ruffian himself. But, hullo! what's this?" He bought the evening paper that was thrust under his nose. "Suicide of Suspected Murderer!" it said, "Plunges into Sea from Channel Boat to Avoid Arrest."

"It is Chandra Austin," Wilson said, having glanced at the paper. "Well, that's the end of him."

"He's cheated the gallows," Kingdon said indignantly.

"I don't think," said Wilson, "you need grudge your unhappy pupil his one bit of good fortune."

## THE CAMDEN TOWN FIRE

### I

"Looks like jam for you," the official of the London Fire Brigade remarked to Mr. Griffith, of the General Assurance Company, as the latter, having penetrated the cordon of police which surrounded the burnt-out house, came up to his side with a glance of inquiry.

"Arson, eh?" Mr. Griffith said softly. "I'd an idea it might be something of the sort. That's why I came down so quickly. We've learnt to keep our weather eye open for fires that take place on March 24th, and it's been suggested to us once or twice that Mr. Goldstein's affairs weren't in any too good trim. You think it's fishy?"

"Fishy, yes," the other replied. "Of course, I can't say anything definite yet. You'll get the official report in due course. But I can say at once, that it looks a bit odd. It's pretty clear that the fire started in at least two places, for one thing; and for another, it had no business to burn up at that rate unless it was helped. Cheap drapery's mostly cotton, of course, and quite inflammable, but the destruction here's more like an oil and colour shop. I should guess a bit of assistance with kerosene. How it got alight in the first instance is another matter—the neighbours say your Mr. Goldstein's away."

"Bother him! That's awkward," said Mr.

Griffith, with a fine disregard of the absent owner's feelings. "Can't suggest the man burnt his place down if he wasn't here. How soon will your people be able to let us have that report, do you suppose?"

"Oh, pretty soon," said the fireman. "Most of it's too hot at present; but it looks like rain, and that'll cool it down. Hullo! what's happening?" On the other side of the gutted building a knot of two or three firemen appeared to be anxiously discussing something. As the two men looked, one of them turned and went up to the sergeant in charge of the police cordon, who immediately strode back with him to the house, while another crossed to Mr. Griffith and his companion.

"What's up?" the latter asked.

"Body over there," was the laconic reply. "Looks as if it had been burnt in bed."

"Whew—w!" With common consent the two others cut their conversation short and proceeded to the spot where the police sergeant and one of his men were standing surveying the charred remains of a human body half buried in the wreckage.

"It's a woman, poor soul," the sergeant was saying. "Burnt in her bed, it seems. There's a bit of the bed-rail, see, and that's charred blanket."

"It'll be Mrs. Hollis, then," the constable volunteered. "Mr. Goldstein's cook. But I thought they were both away for the week-end. Hollis told me they were going."

"And Mr. Goldstein?"

"Oh, he left two days ago. Not coming back till Tuesday, I understand."

"I suppose," said the sergeant, "Hollis's body isn't anywhere here, too? Better look and make sure."

"There's no need," said the constable, who was looking towards the street. "That's Hollis, there, trying to get through."

"Lord amercy!" said the sergeant, moving quickly down to the cordon. "Poor fellow!"

It was a very distressed little man, who met them as they reached the street. Robert Hollis had probably been in bed when he heard the news of the fire and had rushed out without stopping to shave or to make his usual tidy toilet. His tie was awry, his waistcoat buttons half undone, and he clutched at the sergeant's uniform with a desperate look of fear in his eye.

"Sergeant!" he gasped. "I've only just heard—My wife——"

No use to beat about the bush. The sergeant plunged. "I'm sorry to say, Mr. Hollis, that someone has apparently been burnt to death in the house. If your wife was there——"

"Oh!" The little man gave a groan of agony, and would have collapsed, but that the sergeant put a strong arm round him. He nodded to the constable, who pulled out a brandy flask. "Steady," said the sergeant. "Have a bit of this, Mr. Hollis."

Hollis pushed the flask feebly away. He seemed dazed with the shock. "If I'd only known!" he moaned. "If I hadn't left her! Oh, *why* didn't I stay? I've as good as killed her, my poor Mary! . . . Can I see her, sergeant?" he asked abruptly.

"No use going in there, Mr. Hollis," the sergeant



said with rough kindness. "It's not safe for any but the firemen. I've sent along to the station for a stretcher, and you shall see her as soon as they've got her out. Better take a sip of this and sit down quietly." He indicated a heap of loose bricks and Hollis, having gulped obediently at the flask, sat down and buried his head in his hands, giving little faint moans like a shot rabbit, while the others stood round in embarrassed silence.

Presently he lifted his head. "How—how did it happen?" he asked.

"That's what we don't know yet," the sergeant said. "Unless you can throw a bit of light on it."

"I know nothing," Hollis moaned. "Not till Mrs. Odger came round this morning and told us the house was burnt down."

"How did Mrs. Hollis come to be there alone, then?"

"She didn't feel well," Hollis said sadly. "Mr Goldstein gave us the week-end off, and we were going to spend it at my married sister's—Mrs. Hubback's, in Connaught Street. They'd got a party for us last night—cards and a bit o' music and that sort of thing. Mrs. Hollis came over queer at supper and had to lie down. We thought she'd be better after a bit, but she wasn't; and in the end she said she'd rather go home. She was like that"—here something like a sob shook him—"couldn't bear anything but her own home when she was ill. So I took her home and made her a bit of fire and got her some tea and tucked her up cosy. I wanted to have stayed with her, but she wouldn't hear of

"I said I was to go back and not spoil the party, and she'd be all right till the morning."

"So you went back? What time about would that be?"

"About a quarter to ten, as near as I can guess," said Hollis. "Of course, if I'd known I'd never have stirred out of the house again. But she said it was all right, only a giddy turn like, and she'd be all right as soon as she'd slept it off." He dropped his head back to his hands. •

"I see," said the sergeant. "Then you've no idea how it started. You didn't leave any paper near the fire or anything, I suppose?" Hollis shook his head mournfully. "No, I didn't. I haven't any idea how it could have happened, unless Mrs. Hollis got out of bed for something and left something a spark would catch."

"I see. Was there any paraffin or stuff in the house that you know of?"

"Yes, a good bit. Mr. Goldstein likes lamps and oil-stoves, and he kept a lot of kerosene at the back of the shop. He got a new barrel in last Wednesday."

"Three days before quarter day," Mr. Griffith whispered to the sergeant, who nodded.

"Was the stock very low, then?"

"No, not particularly. There was a good bit there already, matter of fact." Hollis was answering mechanically, as one who paid no intelligent heed to the questions.

"I see. Mr. Goldstein's away just now, isn't he? Do you happen to know his address?" was the next question.

"Somewhere in Southend, I think. He didn't leave any address, because he was going to be back on Tuesday," Hollis replied, and then suddenly seemed to wake up. "Why, that's a queer thing now. I'd have sworn——"

'But at that moment the conversation was interrupted by the arrival of the police surgeon with the stretcher. Both men turned to him, and in the confusion Hollis's unfinished sentence was overlooked, and he was allowed without further questioning to follow his wife's remains to the mortuary.

The sergeant went back to the fire brigade official, who was still engaged in inspecting the ruins. "Think it may be arson?" he inquired.

"It's very likely," was the reply, and the official repeated the evidence he had already given to Mr. Griffith. "If this confounded stuff would only cool off a bit I'd let you have my report. But I think I can promise it for you by to-morrow."

"Well, if it's arson it's murder," said the sergeant, "with that poor creature's body there. I'd best be getting back and seeing the inspector. I'll have to ask you to come away too, sir," he added to Mr. Griffith. "This place must be closed to the public now. But I'll see you get a note of what the fire brigade say, and I don't suppose you're interested in the poor woman's death, are you? Unless she was insured with you, too."

"No, she wasn't. Some other firm has the burden of that, if she was insured," Mr. Griffith said, turning to go.

"By the way," the sergeant asked, "what's the amount of Goldstein's insurance with you?"

"Five thousand pounds," said Mr. Griffith. "More than we care to lose in these hard times."

"And you'd reason, to believe he was in difficulties?"

"Nothing in particular," Mr. Griffith said. "We'd been warned that there was talk in the neighbourhood about his being in low water, and certainly we had some difficulty in getting the premiums out of him lately. But there was nothing very definite to go on. I should think your people hereabouts would know more about it than we do."

"Thank you, sir. We've got to get into touch with this Goldstein, wherever he is," said the sergeant. "I wish Hollis had had the address."

## II

On the afternoon of the same day, Inspector Betts was sitting in his room at the police station, going through a pile of notes on the Camden Town Tragedy, as the evening papers called it, and interviewing the distracted husband of the deceased. The report from the fire brigade had just come in, and was to the effect that there was little doubt that the fire had not been due wholly to natural causes. Though this report, naturally, had not been given to the press, some rumours, as so often happens, had got about in the neighbourhood to the effect that the police were not satisfied, and some of these rumours appeared to have reached Robert Hollis's ears, turning his heartbroken grief into a slightly ludicrous, but not wholly undignified

determination to have the matter of his wife's death sifted to the bottom. "She was the best wife a man ever had," he said over and over again, "and there wasn't a soul bore her a grudge." But beyond this he could offer no help to the police. He had seen no one about when he took his wife home to bed, nor when he left the house, and he was quite certain that he had left nothing inflammable within reach of the fire.

"It's a pity," the inspector said with a sigh, "that we don't know where Mr. Goldstein is. You're sure you've not got his address?"

"Only Southend," Hollis said. "He was to come back on Tuesday, you see. But he's sure to see the papers, isn't he? and come back himself—if he is at Southend."

"If he is? What do you mean? Aren't you sure?"

"He said he was going to be there all the weekend," Hollis said doubtfully. "But if I hadn't known that I'd have sworn I saw him in Camden Road last night."

"In Camden Road?" The Inspector looked up sharply. "When was that?"

"Just as I was coming home after I'd put my wife to bed. It was dark, of course, and I couldn't see very well; but the man I thought was Mr. Goldstein turned out of one of those narrow side streets—Welbeck Gardens, I think it was—looked up and down once or twice, and then walked off quickly. He went too quickly for me to catch up, but I remember thinking at the time how funny it

was there should be somebody else so like Mr. Goldstein in the neighbourhood."

"You say he 'looked up and down'?" the inspector asked. "How do you mean? As though he was looking for someone?"

"Yes, maybe," Hollis considered. "But more as though he was looking for there *not* to be someone, if you understand me. Almost as if there might be a lot of traffic, but there wasn't."

"Um—m," said the inspector. But he had no time to pursue the point at the moment, for there came a tap at the door, and a constable informed him that Mr. Goldstein had arrived. Thanking his lucky stars that the owner of the gutted draper's shop should turn up exactly at that moment, the inspector ordered him to be admitted.

Mr. Morris Goldstein in happier times was probably a dapper, persuasive little Jew of between thirty-five and forty. But haste and fright had not improved his appearance and it was a very dishevelled, moist little man who puffed into the Inspector's private room.

"What'th happened?" he gasped, a little of which he normally kept close control appearing in his voice. "What'th all thith?" Then his eye caught sight of Hollis, and he cried with nervous and unfortunate asperity, "What have you been doing, Hollith?" "I like that!" the outraged husband replied, bristling like a turkey cock. "What have you been doing yourself, Mr. Goldstein? Your house catches fire and my wife's burnt to death! What were you doing in Camden Road last night?"

Mr. Goldstein's jaw dropped and his face turned an unhealthy yellow. "I wasn't! I wasn't anywhere near! It's a lie!" he gasped.

"You were! Dodging out of the back streets you were, 'cause I saw you!" Hollis replied, setting his jaw and glaring at him like an angry terrier. "What d'you mean by it, I want to know!"

"Now, then, none of that," the inspector said. "I'm asking the questions here. Now, Mr. Goldstein, I take it you're the owner of this property that was burnt down last night?"

"Y—yes," stammered Mr. Goldstein, eyeing Robert Hollis as if he might bite.

"You were not there when the fire occurred?"

"N—no. I wasn't anywhere near the place."

"Where were you?"

"At Southend. I've just come down. I saw it in the papers."

"Staying with friends?"

"Y—yes."

"Address, please?"

Mr. Goldstein gave it. "B—but," he added, licking lips that seemed uncomfortably dry, "I wasn't there yesterday evening."

"Oh! Where were you, then?"

"I w-went for a walk in the afternoon, late. Then I went to the pictures, and didn't get in till midnight," Hollis, from his corner, gave a slight but unmistakable snort, and the inspector turned on him sharply.

"That'll do, thank you. I've had your views. Now, Mr. Goldstein, this man says he saw you in

Camden Road about ten o'clock last night. Do you say you weren't there?"

"Of c-course I wasn't. I told you I was in Southend. I w-wasn't in London."

"Then you've no idea how this fire broke out."

"None whatever. I thought the house was empty and shut up."

"I see. Well, Mr. Goldstein, that's all I want of you for the present. But please don't go far away. We shall be sure to need you again. Now, Mr Hollis, please, one moment with you." And, dismissing the still shaking draper, the inspector got Hollis to repeat for his benefit the story of the mysterious meeting in the Camden Road.

"That's a frightened man, if ever I saw one," he reflected to himself when Hollis had at length been dismissed; "and a damned thin lie, if ever I heard one. I shouldn't be surprised if I have another little conversation with Mr. Morris Goldstein before he's much older. Meantime, I suppose I'd better let the Yard know how things stand."

### III

"Hullo!" said Mr. Griffith to his friend and fellow practitioner, Mr. Edward Murray of the City and Regional Insurance Company, meeting him outside the police cordon in Cardonald Street. "Are you on this job too?"

"Yes," said the other. "We insured the lady, you see. It's not for a great deal, and so far as I know it's all in order, but I heard you were looking



into the matter, and so I thought I'd come along too—my firm being no keener than the next on paying out cash it hasn't got to. I gather you're trying to make it out arson, eh ? ”

“ We are,” said Mr. Griffith. “ And I think we're going to succeed, too,” he added with ill-concealed satisfaction. “ You hear they arrested Goldstein, the owner of the place, this morning ? ”

“ Yes. Supposed to have taken that way out of his financial difficulties, isn't he ? ”

“ Yes. And what's more, our man who's been making inquiries finds that they were a good bit deeper than was supposed—at least, if gossip's true.”

“ About two per cent., usually,” Mr. Murray said wisely. “ What does it say, this time ? ”

“ That Goldstein was entangled with a young woman who was going to have a child, and was putting the screw on him to make him pay up. It's quite likely, anyway. Oh, I think we've saved our money from Mr. Morris Goldstein, anyway.”

“ Well, I suppose I ought to wish you luck,” Mr. Murray said. “ But I wish you'd hit on another way out, I must say.”

“ Why, are you a friend of Goldstein's ? ”

“ God forbid. But, don't you see, if you're going to go for Goldstein it's not a ha'porth of good to us.”

“ To you ? ”

“ Yes. If Goldstein burnt the woman, we've got to pay up just as much as if it was an accident. Our only chance is for it to've been suicide—that she

herself started the fire—and I was hoping your people might take the same view."

"Nasty way to commit suicide." Griffith, the less callous of the two vultures, gave a little shudder. "And not very likely either. No, Murray, I think we'll stick to our own explanation. But there's a C.I.D. man in there poking about the remains. You might ask what he thinks. I'm hanging about to see if he'll have anything to say when he comes out. We want to know where we are."

The two experts then possessed their souls in what patience they could, until the police guard opened to let through a lean, active man of forty or thereabouts, with an unusually keen, intelligent face and bright steady gray eyes. Him Mr. Griffith introduced to his companion, as Superintendent Wilson of the C.I.D., and asked if there was any news. "Mr. Murray, there, would like a verdict of arson and suicide," he added.

"Well, well. You want the poor woman to make away with herself in a very unpleasant manner," was Wilson's comment. "But I don't think I've any business to anticipate the coroner—particularly in regard to suicide."

"That means he's not giving anything away," Griffith, who had previous experience of Wilson, interpreted to himself. "What about the arson?" he asked aloud.

"Well, the whole neighbourhood seems to be talking about it. I don't think I shall be disclosing any state secrets," Wilson said with a smile, "if I say that there is suspicion of arson. But the

inquest's fixed for "to-morrow, so you'll be able to hear all about it then. Good-day."

"If that's all your highly-placed friends can tell us," Murray grumbled as he went away, "I'm hanged if it seems to me worth wasting half the morning to hear." Nor did he suspect that Wilson's own impression of him was scarcely more favourable.

"Of all heartless ghouls," the latter said to Inspector Blaikie, with whom he was discussing at Scotland Yard his morning's work, "commend me to insurance companies. We may have to put normal human feelings aside in our work, but at least we don't sit down and calculate exactly how much we can make out of it. Griffith's comparatively harmless; but that other fellow was only hoping I'd give him a tip to enable him to get out of paying the poor woman's husband his insurance money."

"And did you?"

"I did not. Not that there was any to give, anyway. The ruins were singularly uncommunicative."

"Isn't it arson, then?"

"Oh, I think so. The fire brigade people are quite certain, and, after all, it's their speciality. Besides, I could see for myself that the fire had started in more than one place, and so on. No, what I was trying to do was to get some evidence to show who had done it. But I got nothing, unless there's anything to be made of these." He took from his pocket two or three objects of charred and blackened metal.

"Steel coat buttons of some sort, I should say," said Blaikie. "What about 'em? Did you find the coat?"

"No, it was burnt. Burnt, in fact, just at one of the places where the fire seems to have started. At least, that's where I found the buttons. Of course, they may not be any help."

"You don't think it was Goldstein, then?"

"Oh, it's probable—more than probable—that it was. But he ought to have a fair show at least, and I'm not at all sure he's getting it. Betts is a good officer, but he's more of a bulldog than a sleuth. And he's obviously scared the little Jew to death."

"Evidence looks pretty strong, though," Blaikie said. "Especially now that Betts has found out about this entanglement with the Schensinger woman."

"That's so," Wilson agreed. "I'd like to look into it a bit further, though."

#### IV

That same morning, Dr. Michael Prendergast, a "rising" young physician who had recently set up his plate in Harley Street, and was beginning to wonder whether the sensation of "rising" was an adequate compensation for having nothing to do when you had risen, was rather surprised to receive a visit from a distinctly fourth-rate sort of solicitor, the kind of man whom one associates with the defence of shady financial cases which yet just manage to keep on the right side of the law, but not the kind one imagines a frequent visitor to Harley Street. He was still more surprised, however, when he learned his visitor's business. It

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appeared that the seedy gentleman came not on his own behalf, but on the part of a friend, one Morris Goldstein, now committed for trial on a charge of murder and arson, who had besought him to carry an urgent appeal to Dr. Prendergast, as his one possible friend in the world, for aid in his present entanglement. For a moment Michael did not recognise the name; then there suddenly came to him a recollection of one snowy night when he, a rowdy medical student new to London, after joining one of those idiotic ragging battles in which medical students seem to take particular pleasure, had been knocked down and left half drunk and quite unconscious in a doorway in North London. Here he had been found by a belated Jewish citizen, who had not only taken him in, warmed and fed him and got a doctor to attend to his injuries, but had actually kept and nursed him in his house for three or four days while the threatened attack of pneumonia was being warded off. It was very probable that Mr. Morris Goldstein had saved his life on that occasion; at least, he had certainly done enough for him to have a considerable claim on Michael's services at the present moment, particularly if, as his solicitor hinted, he was friendless, in very low financial water, and accused on fairly heavy evidence of a crime of which he was innocent. The fact that he had got hold of a very unpleasing lawyer, who seemed by no means equally convinced of his innocence, Michael felt, could not be allowed to outweigh the obligation; and, accordingly, in a very few minutes he was in a taxi making for

Brixton gaol, accompanied by the solicitor to serve as an introduction.

"There'll have to be a warder there while you talk to him," the latter said. "But they don't listen much." Michael wished that he himself was rather more experienced in the ways of prisons.

It was a very miserable frightened little Jew whom he found at length when he had passed through all the formalities, and it was some time before he could cut short the Jew's protestations of gratitude at his prompt arrival and bring him to the point. He was, he learned, the only port in a storm, the only possible saviour of the wretched Mr. Goldstein, who was alone and friendless in the world, and victim of a cruel and heartless conspiracy which would shortly bring him to the gallows as well as to financial ruin. Making every allowance for his very alarming position, Michael could scarcely resist a temptation to pick him up and shake some courage into his trembling body; but he contented himself with repeated adjurations to him to produce more details, as a result of which he acquired by degrees the story which the reader has already heard.

"Um-m-m." He thought it over for a minute or two. "Then what they've got against you is this. You were in financial difficulties—you couldn't have met your bills at quarter day. In addition, you were afraid of this woman Scheninger's demands." Goldstein nodded miserably as each point was made. "You'd ordered in a big barrel of kerosene, though there was some in the house already."

"I didn't know there was," Goldstein interrupted. "I order stores when I'm asked to. I don't go down and count."

"You cleared the house, or thought you'd cleared it, for the week-end; and if Mrs. Hollis hadn't felt ill, there would have been nobody there. Then you went away to Southend, but you're supposed to have been seen lurking in the neighbourhood a little before the fire must have broken out, and at a time when nobody can witness to your having been in Southend . . . Well, it's a lot, no doubt; but I don't see that it's conclusive. Nobody can *prove* that you did it, after all. My advice to you, Mr. Goldstein, is to stick to your story; and perhaps someone will turn up who remembers seeing you at that Southend cinema."

"Ah, but no one can!" Goldstein interrupted despairingly.

"Why, what do you mean?"

"I wasn't there, Dr. Prendergast," Goldstein said, speaking in the lowest possible whisper. "I have been a terrible fool. I did not know, when they asked me first, that I was to be charged. And afterwards, I was so frightened, I did not know what to do. But I will tell you now. I was not in Southend; I was in London. It was I that Hollis saw that night in the Camden Road."

"But you denied——"

"I did. But it was a lie. Listen to me one moment, Dr. Prendergast, and I will tell you how it came about. That afternoon, I was in Southend, and I received a telegram from this woman, Miriam

Schensinger, saying I must come and see her *at once*, for something very serious had happened, and I must meet her at her lodging in Welbeck Avenue at 9.30 without fail. I know Miriam Schensinger, doctor, and she will not spend a penny unless she has to; so when she sends a telegram, it is certain the matter is serious. I dared not stay away; I must find out what has happened. Maybe her husband has found out, and if so he will kill me, I think. So I went up quickly to London and to her lodgings. But all was dark, there was no answer at all. I dared not be seen hanging about too long—I waited as much as was safe: . . . then I went back, and to Southend. It must have been then that Hollis saw me."

"And you kept all this back? And you lied about it?" Even Michael's inexperience could see that the position was not improved by this recital.

"I did. But when they asked me, I thought only that I must not let anyone know what had happened between me and Miriam Schensinger. Now, of course, they have found it all out—and I am to hang. But, doctor, I swear I did not do it—I swear—I swear that it's all the truth I have told you now!"

"Where's the telegram?" Michael asked. Useless to consider whether or not he believed Goldstein until he had all the facts. But the latter held up his hands in despair.

"I burned it. I never keep correspondence of such a kind when I have read what is in it. But I can remember it—it is all written on my *le*



It said, 'Goldstein, 22 Avenue Villas, Southend : Come Welbeck nine-thirty to-night without fail : disaster threatens : Miriam.' She had even put two words over the shilling, so I knew it must be serious," Goldstein sighed.

"No address ? "

"No. But it was handed in at the Post Office in High Holborn, where she works. I noticed she was at least not injured," said Goldstein. He peered anxiously in Michael's face. "Do you—no, you do not believe me? But I swear to you—I swear again, this is all the truth! I did not fire the house; I did not go to it even. But if you do not believe me, what chance is there that the man called Wilson, the Scotland Yard man, will?" He seemed about to burst into tears.

"Wilson!" Michael caught at the straw. "But I know him! I once helped him in one of his cases, and I can assure you that the last thing he wants to do is to convict innocent people. Look here, if that's really all the truth you've told me, I think the best thing you can do is to tell it to Wilson himself—or I will, if you like. You can be sure he'll make the best of it for you. That's the best thing you can do."

Goldstein was obviously very frightened, and unwilling to take the plunge, but at last he consented to let Wilson be informed, only adding a string of further asseverations that he had now told every word of the truth, and was completely innocent of the crime.

"By the way," Michael recollected as he was

about to go, "where *was* Mrs. Schensinger that night, when you didn't find her?"

"I don't know," the little Jew moaned. "I tried to see her, but she was not in. And I dared not go too openly, lest everyone find out. I was going again, but I was arrested."

Still, she must have been somewhere, Michael reflected; and surely she must have some explanation of having broken an appointment made with such urgency. Perhaps she might have some light to throw on the whole problem. It seemed worth trying, anyway; and, having obtained the lady's address from Goldstein, he decided, before going to Wilson, to call on her and see what explanation she had to offer.

But he was grievously disappointed. He did not like Mrs. Schensinger in the first place—a red-haired, blowsy Jewess of loud muscular presence and obviously uncertain temper. She could have eaten Morris Goldstein in two mouthfuls, and Michael found pause to wonder at the little man's taste. Nor did he feel that he knew in the least how to handle her; she treated him as an open enemy from the moment he appeared, and every minute he expected to be hit on the head with a rolling-pin or some such object. But far more serious than her truculent manner was the fact that, when she did at last consent to discuss the subject of his visit, she utterly denied knowledge of the telegram. She had neither seen nor heard anything of Morris Goldstein for more than a week, nor did she want to, she said. He was a mean-spirited cur, and a skin-flint at that; and she made it quite plain that her

dislike of Goldstein extended to all Goldstein's acquaintances. She had sent no telegram and nothing would have induced her to ; and to this she stuck till Michael was fain to take his leave, observing as he left her that another caller, a little man going slightly bald, whose face seemed to him vaguely familiar, was standing on the doorstep.

He did not feel very hopeful as he went in search of Wilson. All he had done so far, it seemed, was to destroy Goldstein's last defence ; and, indeed, the only thing that held him on his course, and gave him any doubt of the little man's guilt, was that he could not conceive how even the stupidest criminal should have thought it any use applying to a Harley Street physician, no matter how much indebted to him, to aid in concealing a murder. Except for that, he would have had no doubt that Goldstein was guilty, especially after the collapse of the telegram defence, and he said as much to Wilson when at length he ran him to earth in his office at Scotland Yard.

"Well, we can check that bit, at all events," Wilson said ; and ringing the bell on his table gave a few short orders to the man who answered it. "Would you like to wait, Michael, and see if your incredibly foolish benefactor has treated you to some more romance ? Only keep quiet, there's a good fellow ; I want to think."

Michael obediently sat quiet while Wilson, his eyes half closed, and leaning back in his chair with the tips of his fingers pressed together, gave an imitation of a man asleep rather than engaged in thought.

He looked up instantly, however, when his emissary returned at the end of an hour and laid a paper on the desk.

"Well, that's one thing cleared up," he said, "at any rate. The telegram *was* sent, Michael. From High Holborn, at 3.45."

"But not by Mrs. Schensinger, presumably. Who by, then?"

"By M. Smith," said Wilson; "which doesn't help us much. Except that the Post Office declares M. Smith to be a woman. I think it's about time I took a hand in this game." He rose to his feet rapidly and stuffed some papers into his pockets.

"Do you think Goldstein's guilty?" Michael asked.

"No, I don't. But I think someone's very anxious I should think so."

"But who?"

"The guilty person, my boy."

"But who is he? or she?"

"That's the trouble, of course," said Wilson. "I can't tell for certain. And, as you should know by now, it's not part of my duty to provide you with suspicions. But," he added, seeing Michael's face fall, "I'll tell you what I *will* do, if you like. I'm really extremely grateful to you for the information you've provided, and as a reward I'll take you with me while I follow up one clue. That is, if you'd care to come." Michael, of course, was only too willing; and in a very few minutes they were in a taxi speeding northwards.

"But what information have I given you?"

Michael asked in great bewilderment, looking up from an account of the tragedy which he was reading in the evening paper. "I only brought you a bogus telegram."

"Precisely," Wilson said. "That's it. What's the matter?"

"I'll give you some more, then!" Michael said excitedly, pointing to a photograph in the paper, under which was printed *Robert Hollis, Manservant to the Accused*. "That man entered Miriam Schensinger's house just as I was leaving it! I thought his face seemed vaguely familiar."

But Wilson seemed quite unmoved. "Well, why not?" he said. "They know each other; there's no secret about it. They may have a dozen reasons for making calls, apart from the fact that both are now connected with the same case. We can't build anything on that." There was a pause.

"Where are we going now?" Michael asked in a small, crushed voice.

"To the house of one Mrs. Hubback, the sister of Robert Hollis," was the cheerful reply. "I want to make a few inquiries about Mrs. Hollis's condition on the night of her death."

"Mental condition?" asked Michael curiously.

"Or physical. Aren't you always telling me how closely allied they are?" Wilson said provokingly.

"But—do you mean to suggest that *Mrs. Hollis* got out of bed and set light to the house herself? And then got back and waited to be burnt?" Michael asked in an incredulous tone.

"That solution," Wilson said, "has been put to

me very strongly by the representative of the company which insured Mrs. Hollis's life. And one can't deny that it's just possible. But here we are." He jumped out as the taxi drew up in one of the respectable but mean streets with which the Camden Town neighbourhood abounds and inquired for Mrs. Hubback. The small girl, about ten or eleven years old, who opened the door to him, said that she was in; and when Wilson and his companion entered the sitting-room they found not only Mrs. Hubback, but three more of her children playing about, as well as her brother, who was sitting in a rocking-chair close by the small fire, and appeared still overburdened with grief. Mr. Hubback—if there was one—seemed not yet to have returned from work.

"There, Bob, don't take on so," Mrs. Hubback was saying as they entered. "It can't do Mary no good, poor soul, and she'd be the first to say you wasn't to make yourself ill fretting."

"How can I help it?" Hollis said, lifting a fierce despairing face, which made him look curiously different from the man Michael had seen entering Mrs. Schensinger's house, though from the features he was obviously the same. "How can I help it, when nobody's punished the scoundrel who did for her? I'd give half my life to bring him to justice." "I'm sure we'd all do that, Bob," his sister said soothingly.

"I am sure you would," Wilson intervened, making the company start. "And so I am sure you will not mind answering one or two questions

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which may help to clear up the mystery." He briefly introduced himself and Michael and explained their errand. The Hubback family settled itself to regard him with round, astonished eyes, except Robert Hollis, who, after the first glance, had sunk back into his attitude of wretched apathy, not believing, apparently, that even Scotland Yard could do anything to help his mission of vengeance.

"What time, exactly, did Mrs. Hollis leave this house?" Wilson began.

"About quarter to nine, I think," Mrs. Hubback reflected. "Yes, we began supper about quarter past seven, and Mary was taken queer almost at once. I took her to have a lay-down on my bed, and she thought she'd be better directly; but she wasn't, so Bob here took her home."

"When you say 'queer,' what exactly do you mean? Was she very ill?"

"Oh, no, I shouldn't say so. She was a bit sick to start with, and then she came over heavy and queer like and didn't want to move. Half asleep, she was."

"And when you had got her home," Wilson turned to Hollis, "what was she like then?"

"Much the same, sir," Hollis said. "Very heavy and dazed—almost as if she'd hit her head. That's why I thought she'd be best and safest in bed."

"You never heard, either of you, of Mrs. Hollis walking in her sleep?" They both denied the possibility. "And you hadn't noticed anything strange about her manner lately?"

"Oh, no, sir!" Mrs. Hubback was obviously

shocked by the suggestion. Hollis merely shook his head.

"Well, you should know," Wilson said. "And then, Mr. Hollis tucked his wife up and made her comfortable and came on here. What time about was that, Mrs. Hubback?" He had taken a small steel object from his pocket and was playing with it as he spoke.

"Just ten past ten," Mrs. Hubback responded promptly. "I know, because I looked at the clock, thinking if he wasn't back by half past, he probably wouldn't be coming."

"But he did. And how long did the party go on, after he'd come back?"

"Oh, they were all away by eleven, sir."

"And then you all went to bed?"

"Yes, sir." The woman looked rather puzzled at the cross-examination, which was suddenly cut short by a cry from her youngest child.

"Uncle Bob! The man's got Uncle Bob's button!"

Robert Hollis started from his stupor at the exclamation and looked round.

"That's a button off your best coat, uncle!" the child repeated, pointing an accusing finger at the cut steel object in Wilson's hands. "The one you had on last night. Where'd that man get it from?"

Wilson looked at Hollis, who stared at the button as if it were a kind of snake. "Oh, from my house, I suppose," he said at last. "I got my coat in a mess, lighting the fire for Mary, and changed it."



"No, Uncle Bob, you didn't!" another childish voice broke in. "You had your best coat on when you came back. Don't you remember, Sara Daniel wanted you to give her a button off it? Oh! Don't!"

"No, you don't! The door, Michael!"

As the child spoke, Robert Hollis's face had turned a ghastly gray, and with the look of a madman in his eyes he sprang across the room as though he could strangle the accusing words in its throat. In a second, Wilson was upon him; but he fought like a wild beast, and it was a minute or two before Wilson, strong as he was, could overpower him sufficiently to get his police whistle to his lips. Michael, rather bewildered by the turn of events, stood obediently with his back to the door until a push came from outside, and Wilson motioned to him to move.

"Robert Hollis," Wilson said, as the two constables, whom he must have instructed to be in waiting, entered, "I arrest you for conspiring to murder your wife, Mary Hollis, and to burn down the house and shop at 21 Cardonald Street on March 23rd last, and I warn you that anything you say may be used in evidence against you."

"Conspiring?" Michael said, as they returned. "But why? Who with?"

"Why, with your red-headed friend, Miriam Schensinger," Wilson answered. "It was she who

sent the telegram ; at least, the description given at the High Holborn post office fits her admirably. It was that bogus telegram which you so usefully unearthed for me, Michael."

" I don't see how that led you to the solution."

" It made it quite clear, if the telegram had really been sent, that Morris Goldstein was innocent. Further, it showed that someone—the real criminal, of course—was determinedly trying to incriminate him. The question was, who was that criminal ? If Miriam Schensinger was the sender of the telegram, she was presumably concerned ; but she had no apparent motive either for burning down Goldstein's house or for getting him hanged. He was her milch cow.

" But I had already got my eye on Hollis, for two reasons ; first, because he had the opportunity to commit the crime. For you realise, of course, that his *alibi* wasn't really an alibi at all. There was nothing to prevent his getting out of the Hubbaks' house and going back to Cardonald Street in the middle of the night. Secondly, he did stand to gain his wife's insurance money, and £500 has inspired many a murderer before now. So I had him watched carefully, and learned that he was occasionally seen about with Mrs. Schensinger, who was the other chief witness against Goldstein. Of course, that didn't go for very much.

" Then I had the Home Office pathologist examine poor Mrs. Hollis's body, just to see if she had really died naturally, or if we had to do with a fire arranged to cover up a murder ; and he, somewhat to my

surprise, reported that there were distinct traces of a non-fatal dose of laudanum having been taken shortly before death. Immediately, of course, I connected this dose with the poor woman's sudden illness, and I did not see who, save her husband, could be responsible for administering it. It was administered, of course, to prevent her waking and giving the alarm.

"Then you came along with Goldstein's confession, and presented me with another piece of evidence, viz., that Hollis, and not Goldstein, was in fact responsible for the extra supply of kerosene. In this way, part of the evidence he had manufactured against his employer was turned against himself.

"When I took you to the Hubbacks' house, I was primarily looking to see whether any one of the household would yield any evidence which would enable me to establish that Hollis had gone out again after he was supposed to be in bed. As you know, I got what I wanted, but if Hollis had not lost his head at the critical moment, I might have been put to a good deal more difficulty. What he did, of course, was to spill kerosene over his coat on his second visit to the house, when he prepared the pyre. He did not dare go back in it, and left it, as he thought, to be consumed. But he forgot the steel buttocks, and they gave him away."

"But why . . . ? Why did he want to murder his wife and get Goldstein hanged ?" Michael asked.

"Because, I fancy, he was intending to elope with the Schensinger woman, and wanted his wife's

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insurance to finance his departure. Oh, that red-headed girl is responsible for a great deal in this affair. She got Morris Goldstein into her toils, and succeeded in bleeding him pretty nearly white before Hollis got at her and suggested a better plan. And as to getting him hanged, well, naturally Hollis didn't want to hang himself for the murder of his wife, and if he could get it put on to Goldstein he was safe in that quarter. And Goldstein, like a fool, played direct into his hands. Quite a pretty little plot—barring the coat buttons."

"I call it diabolical," Michael shivered. "And the woman—you mean she was in it throughout? Have you arrested her?"

"Oh, I've no doubt she was. I think the whole thing was carefully staged for Lady Day. But I've too little on her, so far, to do much good. My hope is that Hollis will give her away."

But that hope Hollis, either from affection or from some other motive, refused to gratify, and went to the gallows without having betrayed his accomplice. So, though she has disappeared from Welbeck Avenue, there is still somewhere about, and probably in London, a red-headed Jewish siren of uncertain temper and approaching middle age, the very thought of whom is sufficient to send Mr. Morris Goldstein into a cold sweat of terror.

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